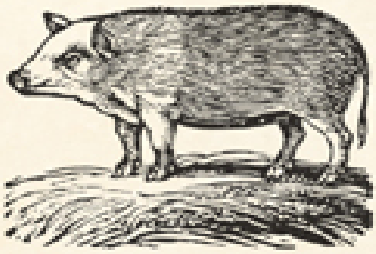
AMERICANA LIBRARY

FOXFIRE

Meats and Small Game



Edited by

FOXFIRE STUDENTS

Meats and Small Game

The Foxfire Americana Library
Edited by Foxfire Students

Anchor Books
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A NOTE ABOUT THE FOXFIRE AMERICANA LIBRARY SERIES

For almost half a century, high school students in the Foxfire program in Rabun County, Georgia, have collected oral histories of their elders from the southern Appalachian region in an attempt to preserve a part of the rapidly vanishing heritage and dialect. The Foxfire Fund, Inc., has brought that philosophy of simple living to millions of readers, starting with the bestselling success of *The Foxfire Book* in the early 1970s. Their series of fifteen books and counting has taught creative self-sufficiency and has preserved the stories, crafts, and customs of the unique Appalachian culture for future generations.

Traditionally, books in the Foxfire series have included a little something for everyone in each and every volume. For the first time ever, through the creation of The Foxfire Americana Library, this forty-five-year collection of knowledge has been organized by subject. Whether down-home recipes or simple tips for both your household and garden, each book holds a wealth of tried-and-true information, all passed down by unforgettable people with unforgettable voices.

SLAUGHTERING HOGS

The prime source of meat for the early family in these mountains was hogs. Part of the reason for this can be seen by a quick look at the recipes. There was almost no part of the animal that could not be used. Each farmer who kept hogs on open range in the mountains had his own identifying brand cut into the ear of each of his animals. Hogs were allowed to fatten themselves on the "mast" of the forest—acorns, chestnuts, and so on. As Mann Norton said, "My father generally kept hunnerd fifty, two hunnerd hogs in th' woods. Most ever'body did. He'd kill ten'r 'twelve at one time off th' mast just t'eat." And Bill Lamb said, "I've see'd little old-fashioned blue guineas. Little old things wouldn't grow much longer'n that [indicating about two feet]. An' I've see'd them s'fat 'til their bellies'ud drag along 'til they couldn't get over a pole in th' woods much bigger'n my leg."

Our contacts tell us that the sweetest meat came from hogs fattened on chestnuts. One problem, however, was that instead of rendering into good white lard, the fat of these hogs would boil down into a dark oil. Acorn mast made the meat taste bitter and altered the consistency of the fat. For these reasons, hogs to be slaughtered were often rounded up and brought down out of the mountains to the farms where they were fed on corn for anywhere from a few weeks to over a month. This removed any bitterness from the meat and softened the fat properly for rendering into lard.

Hogs were slaughtered, cut up, cured, and smoked at home. In fact, in many mountain homes today, slaughtering remains a family venture—the only difference being that now there is no more open forest range, so the hogs are kept and fed at the farm until killing time. The actual slaughtering is done in late November when the weather turns cold to stay. Since there were no meat freezers in the

mountains, one had to rely on the winter weather to keep the meat from spoiling while it cured.

Most families paid strict attention to the phase the moon was in, and they killed on the first cold day they could get when the moon was "right." As one said, "If you kill a hog on th' new of th' moon, slice it and put it in a pan, it'll just blow you 'til you can't fry th' grease out of it hardly. You got t'kill it on th' right time of th' moon. You don't never want to kill it on th' new moon." Another said, "We'd kill hogs on th' full moon, or just about th' full moon. While th' moon was shrinkin', th' meat'd shrink. There'd be a lot'a lard an' grease if it'uz on th' shrinkin' of th' moon. If it'uz on th' new moon, you wouldn't make much lard, and th' meat'd swell up when y'cooked it 'stead'a shrink." Other farmers would kill their own hogs when the moon was shrinking, but they would take hogs to market when the moon was growing so that the meat would weigh more.

Early in the morning of butchering day, the scalding water was readied. Some farms had a cast-iron bowl about four feet in diameter set in a stone furnace. The bowl was filled with water, a fire built in the furnace, and by the time the hog was killed, the water would be hot. Other families simply had an oil drum tipped half over and filled half full with water. Into this they put heated rocks which heated the water. Others heated water in pots to pour over the carcass. The water in all cases was heated nearly to the boiling point, and ashes were often added to help loosen the hair.

Meanwhile, the hog was killed (either by a sharp blow on the head with a rock or axe head, or by shooting it in the back of the head or between the eyes), and its jugular vein (on the left side of the throat about three inches back from the jawbone) pierced immediately. As one described it, "Stick'im right in th' goozle'ere."

When the bleeding slowed, the hog was dragged to the "scaldin' place" and dipped in the hot water and rolled over to loosen the hair (by pulling or scraping), hauled out and scraped with a not-too-sharp knife, immersed again immediately, and the procedure repeated until most of the hair was off the hide. The hog was not left in the water too long at any one time or the hair would "set" rather than loosen.

ILLUSTRATION 1 Hobe Beasley and John Hopper first lift the hog's head into a tilted barrel filled with scalding water, and leave it there long enough to loosen the hair.

ILLUSTRATION 2 Hobe, John, Mrs. Hopper, and Lum Williams work over the hog until it is scraped clean.

ILLUSTRATION 3 Scalding water can be poured over places where a few hairs remain and then they too are scraped off, leaving a completely bare carcass. Here Hobe finishes a leg.

ILLUSTRATION 4 The leaders in the back legs are exposed, and the gambling stick is inserted between leader and leg.

If for some reason the hog had to be killed and cleaned away from home, the men often dug a hole in the ground, filled it with water, added rocks heated in the fire, and then dipped the hog in that. Others simply laid the hog on the ground, covered him with burlap sacks, hay, grass, or anything that would help hold the heat, and then poured boiling water over him to loosen the hair. Another told us that they used to hang the hog up by the nose, cut the hide off in three-inch strips ("Hit'll come plumb off pertiest you ever seen"), and gut it.

When the hide was scraped clean, the hamstring was exposed on both hind legs, and a gambling stick sharpened on both ends—or a singletree—was slipped behind the exposed tendons. The hog was then strung up on a stout pole (see *Illustration 5* and *Illustration 6*), the ends of which were set in forked supports, or in the forks of two nearby trees.

ILLUSTRATION 5 Next the supporting pole is run between the hog's legs and …

ILLUSTRATION 6 … raised into place, suspending the hog head down. Hot water is again dashed over the carcass, and any spots that still may not be completely clean are scraped again.

ILLUSTRATION 7 The cleaned hog is now ready to gut. Hobe prepares to make the first incision—a long cut down the middle of the underside from crotch to chin.

ILLUSTRATION 8 The first incision is made taking care not to cut the intestinal membrane.

ILLUSTRATION 9 Mrs. Hopper prepares to make the second cut.

ILLUSTRATION 10 The second cut is made, and the intestines drop from the gut cavity and are caught in a tub.

Hot water was then poured over those places not completely clean, and they were scraped again.

Now the neck was cut around the base of the head and through the throat so that the backbone was ringed completely. Then the head was twisted off and set aside to be used as explained in the recipe here. The remaining blood was allowed to drain from the carcass, and then, with a sharp butcher knife, one long, deep cut was made down the middle of the underside from crotch to chin, being careful not to slice the envelope of membrane holding the intestines. Then the large intestine was cut free at the anus, the end pulled out and tied shut, the gullet cut at the base of the throat, the membrane holding the intestines sliced, and the entrails allowed to fall out into a large tub placed under the carcass. The liver was then cut free and the gall bladder excised from its side, and then the liver was cut up and set aside to soak for later use. Also set aside and saved, in most cases, were the lungs, heart, and kidneys. The valves, veins, and arteries were trimmed off the heart, the stomach and small intestines retrieved from the entrails, and all were drained, washed, and set in water to soak while the cutting continued.

When the inside of the carcass was completely cleaned, it was taken down and cut up. If there were enough people, one group might begin scalding a second hog, another might prepare the entrails and organs since most of them had to be used at once, and yet another might cut up the gutted carcass. A sausage pot would be started for the trimmings of lean meat, and a lard pot would be started for all the trimmings of fat which would be rendered the next day.

The cutting operation was done in several ways. Here is the most common: Remove leaf lard while carcass is still hanging. (The leaf lard is that fat which held the intestines.) Throw it into the fat pot to be rendered into lard and cracklin's. It is not salted and cured. Then make one cut all the way down the middle of the back into the backbone. Take the carcass down and put it on its back on a table or counter. With an axe, chop all the way down both sides of the backbone, close to the backbone, and lift it out. The meat then falls into two pieces. (This is the old way. Nowadays they saw the backbone right down the middle and get pork chops and fat-back.) Now remove the tenderloin. It lies on either side of the backbone's cavity. Under that is the fatback, which can be taken out if you wish to use it separately in cooking. Now remove the two sections of rib cage by slicing the mesentery between the outside of the ribs and the inside of the middlin' meat. Each section should come out as one piece.

ILLUSTRATION 11 The large intestine is cut free at the anus, pulled out, and …

ILLUSTRATION 12 … tied off with a cloth strip or cord. The gut cavity is then cleaned completely.

Find the joints, and cut the shoulders and hams off. What's left is the middlin' (or "side meat"). This thick slice of meat from each side, if cured and smoked, is the source of country bacon. You simply slice the bacon off the middlin' meat, cutting in the same direction in which the ribs originally ran. "Streak'a'lean" is the same lean middlin' meat as the bacon, but it is only salt cured, not smoked.

Now the ribs are placed on a chopping block and cut into two-inch sections and put aside to can, along with the backbone which is cut apart at each vertebra.

Hams, shoulders, middlin' (and jowls if you wish) are trimmed up. The trimmings are put into either the lard or sausage pots, and the

rest is set aside for immediate salting.

The backbones and ribs are usually canned. Tenderloin is often cooked at once, along with the heart, lungs, liver, kidneys, and head (see recipes for hog, here). Sausage is ground and canned at once. Fat scraps are usually left until the next morning. Then they are cut up and the lard rendered out.

CURING AND SMOKING HOG

Meat was cured by the mountain families in several ways. Professional butchers today would probably shudder at the apparently haphazard measurements they used, but they often seemed to work.

Hams, shoulders, and middlin' meat (and the jowl if you wished) were the pieces most commonly cured. These pieces were taken to the smokehouse as soon after the slaughtering as possible—preferably while the meat was still warm, and never more than twenty-four hours after. On some farms, the smokehouse sides were relatively open, being constructed of two to three inch slats with a three-quarter-inch crack between each. Many have told us that a common sight in the spring was smokehouses with gray smoke billowing out the sides.

Others, however, claim that a sealed smokehouse (usually logs chinked with mud) is better as it keeps insects out, keeps the meat cool in warm weather, and keeps it from freezing in cold weather. Arguments could be made for either kind.

The meat was taken to the smokehouse, thoroughly salted, and then set up on waist-high shelves or down in boxes or barrels to "take the salt." Most preferred the shelf system as it allowed the meat to get the necessary ventilation more easily. Meanwhile, the winter weather provided natural refrigeration while the meat was going through the curing process.

There were different ways to begin the curing. Mann Norton's father would simply "cover each hunk of meat up good and white" with salt. Taylor Crockett preferred eight pounds of salt for each hundred pounds of meat. He mixed the salt with one quart of molasses, two ounces of black pepper, and two ounces of red pepper. Then he smeared the mix on the meat, allowing it to stay six to eight weeks depending on the weather (longer if it got very cold).

“Valley John” Carpenter used simply five pounds of salt for a two hundred-pound hog. Lon Reid used ten pounds of salt per hundred pounds of meat. Lake Stiles, rather than putting the meat in a smokehouse, would take it to his cellar which had a dirt floor. He would put the meat right on the floor with the flat side down, and allow the earth to draw the animal taint out of the meat, keep it cool, and prevent souring or spoiling.

If meat was needed during the winter months, the family simply cut what they needed off the curing pork, washed the salt off, soaked it overnight, parboiled it the next day, and then cooked it. If it were left all winter, it would go through a second operation in the spring.

When the weather began to get warm (usually when the peach trees bloomed), the second phase of the operation began on the meat that was left. It was taken out of the salt mix, washed, and then treated by any of the following means:

Cover the meat with a mixture of black pepper and borax to keep the “skipper” out. (Skippers are the larvae of the skipper fly.) The meat is then hung in the smokehouse.

Wash the meat thoroughly and coat it with a mixture of brown sugar and pepper. Then put it in a bag and hang it up in the smokehouse.

Turner Enloe washes the meat, and then uses a mixture of one package of brown sugar, two boxes of red pepper, and one box of saltpeter per hog. He adds enough water to the mixture to make a syrup, coats the pieces with the liquid, and then sets them in a box to age. Lizzie Carpenter shells a bushel of white corn. She puts some in the bottom of a wooden box, puts the washed middlin’ meat on top of that, skin side down, covers it with corn, adds another side, and so on until finished. The corn draws the salt out, keeps the meat from tasting strong, and gives it good flavor. Bill Lamb puts a mixture of borax and black pepper on the washed meat and *then* smokes it (see smoking section). Lake Stiles washes the meat and then buries it in a box of hickory ashes. He claims it never tastes strong this way since the ashes keep air from getting to the meat.

His grandmother would bury it in corn meal which would do almost as well.

Many, however, prefer the taste of smoked meat. Holes were poked in the middlin' meat, white oak splits run through the holes, and the meat hung from the joists of the smokehouse. Hams and shoulders were done the same way.

Then a fire was built inside the house. If it had a dirt floor, the fire could be built right on the floor. Otherwise, a wash pot was set in the middle of the room and a fire built in that. The fire itself was made of small green chips of hickory or oak, pieces of hickory bark, or even corncobs in some cases. Using this fuel, the smoke was kept billowing through the house for from two to six days, or until the meat took on the brown crust that was desired both for its flavor, and for its ability to keep flies and insects out of the meat.

If you intend to cure and smoke your own meats, you might want to write the Cooperative Extension Service of the College of Agriculture at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia, and ask them for their booklet *Curing Georgia Hams Country Style*. It gives specific instructions such as:

> The best slaughtering weight for a hog is from 180 to 240 pounds.
>
> Kill hogs only when the temperature is 32–35˚F. Souring bacteria multiply rapidly at temperatures above 40˚. Cure the meat immediately after slaughtering.
>
> Do not cure a bruised ham as it will spoil.
>
> A good curing mixture is eight pounds of salt, three pounds of sugar, and three ounces of saltpeter. Apply the mix at the rate of 1¼ ounces per pound. Use a third of the mixture on the first day, another third on the third day, and the last third on the tenth day. Rub it in thoroughly each time.
>
> On a ham, good salt penetration requires seven days per inch of thickness. Bacon requires from fourteen to sixteen days.
>
> Add another day to the curing schedule for each day the weather is below freezing.

Then wash the outside coating of salt off and leave the meat at a temperature below 40° for another twenty to twenty-five days for salt equalization. Then smoke the meat, if desired. Don't allow the temperature in the smokehouse to exceed 100°. Use hickory, oak, or apple as fuel.

Smoke hams until they are amber or mahogany in color (usually about two days). Smokehouse should be sealed and ventilated with fans, or completely screened for natural ventilation.

THE HEAD

SOUSE—(*Also called "souse meaty," "headcheese" "pressed hog's head," etc.*) Prepare the raw hog's head as follows:

Trim, scrape, or singe off any hairs or bristles that are left.

If you intend to use the ears, brains, snout, tongue, or jowls for any purpose other than souse, remove them and set aside to soak. Otherwise, leave them on the head to be ground up. Note that the ears are gristly, and when ground up in the souse, they leave white flukes of gristle in the meat. This is not harmful, but some find it unattractive.

Cut out the eyes.

The bulk of the head is now halved or quartered with an axe, or left whole (depending on the size of your pot), and while still fresh, is put in a pot of fresh water, usually to soak overnight. This soaking removes the remaining blood from the meat.

We have found only a few people who cook the head whole. One reason is that leaving it whole makes it harder to soak the blood out. Bill Lamb gave a different reason, saying, "Henry'd killed a hog, and when he come in from work, they had it sittin' there cooked. Hadn't even cut th' ears out, th' eyes'r nothin'. Just cooked th' whole head like it was. Had it sittin' in a dish. That'uz th' first thing he seed was that hog lookin' at him when he come in t'dinner, an' he just turned and went back an' never eat a bite."

After soaking, rinse the head until the rinse water runs clear. Then put it in a pot of clean, salty water and cook it slowly until it is good and tender, and the meat begins to fall off the bones. Then remove all meat from the bones and run through a food chopper.

Seasoning depends on your own taste. Some use, per head, one tablespoon of sage, a half teaspoon ground red pepper, and salt and black pepper to taste. Others use one onion, one pod of strong red

pepper chopped fine, and one teaspoon of salt. Beulah Perry uses a little red and black pepper, an onion, a little corn meal, and sage and garlic to taste. Evie Carpenter adds a little vinegar, along with sage, black pepper and onion.

The meat and seasoning are now thoroughly mixed, and then put into capped jars, a mold, or a plate (covered with a clean white cloth). Then, if it is not to be eaten immediately, it is put into the smokehouse where the winter weather will keep it fresh. It can either be eaten cold, or reheated, depending on your preference.

Another method—Proceed as before through the seasoning step. Then put the mixture in a skillet and place on the back of the wood stove until the grease is runny. Remove from the fire, put a plate on top of the meat, and apply pressure to make the grease run out. Repeat until all the grease is out and poured off. Remove the plate, put the meat on a clean plate, and keep in a cold place. Slice as needed.

SCRAPPLE—As told by Mrs. Mann Norton, "Take th' head, an' take th' eyeballs out, an' th' ears, an' cut down in there. Then y'got all th' hairs off of it. Y'put it in a big pot an' cooked it til th' meat just turned loose of th' main big bone.

"Y'lifted them bones out, an' laid your meat over in there an' felt of it with your hands t'see if they wadn't no bones in it. Then y'strain yer liquid through a strainer so th' little bones'd come out. Put'cher liquid back in a pot, and put that mashed meat back in that liquid. Put'cher sage an' pepper in there. Then y'stir it 'til it got t'boilin'. Then y'stick plain corn meal in there til it's just plumb thick. Then y'pour it up in a mold, an' cut it off'n fry it, an' brown it. Tastes just like fish."

Mann Norton added, "Just hold your tongue so y'didn't swaller it when y'went t'eatin'!"

HOG'S HEAD STEW—This recipe comes from the Joanne Carver family. Every harvesttime they plunge into a cooking-canning spree that goes for days and leaves them more than ready for the winter. The measurements given below yielded sixty-three quarts last time

around. If you can't handle quite that much, cut proportionally, subtracting or adding other ingredients according to preference.

1½ hog's heads
2 shoulders or hams of venison
4 chickens
1 peck onions
1 gallon Irish potatoes
5 half gallons each of tomatoes, corn, peas, carrots
6 large cans tomato juice to thin
1 package poultry seasoning
bay leaves to taste
5 pounds salt (or to taste)
Worcestershire Sauce to taste
pepper to taste
broth may be substituted for, or added to the tomato juice

Cook the meat until it comes easily off the bones. Cool, remove the meat from the bones, and grind it up (or run through a food chopper) together with the other ingredients. Place the mixture in quart jars, seal, and cook in a pressure cooker for sixty minutes at ten pounds pressure. Then store away for the lean months.

Her mother's recipe for the same stew, provided us by Brenda Carver, varies somewhat: 1 hog's head, 2 chickens, 4 pounds ground beef, 1 gallon potatoes, 1 gallon tomatoes, 4 number two cans each of peas, corn, and carrots. Chop and blend ingredients, can, cook in pressure cooker for thirty minutes.

JOWLS—The jowls are fatty, so they are often removed rather than being combined with the souse meat. Some salt them down and cure them just like hams or middlin' meat, and save them until warm weather to be boiled with vegetables. Others grind them up with the sausage meat.

Some also fry them. As Bill Lamb said, “Now you talkin’ about part of a hog that I love is th’ jowls. They ain’t a better tastin’ bite’a meat in a hog than th’ jowl is. You fry it.”

TONGUE—Clean by pouring boiling water over it and scraping it. Then boil until tender in a little salt water with pepper added if you wish. Slice and serve.

BRAIN—Most of our contacts put the brains in hot water to loosen the veil of skin covering them. Then they boil them in one cup of water, adding salt and pepper to taste while stirring. When cooked, they mash them with a potato masher, put them in a pan, and scramble them with eggs.

Others let them stand in cold water for one to two hours. Then they drain them and remove any unwanted fibers. Then cook as above for twenty minutes in salted water and proceed as above, using eggs, etc.

SNOUT (*also called the “rooter”*)—the snout is often cleaned and roasted. Mann Norton claims, “Lot’a people throwed away that they called th’ rooter. Oh I forbid that. I’d rather have that as any part a’-th’ hog. Oh that’s good eatin’.”

EARS—If the ears were not used in souse, they could also be boiled in salt water until tender, and eaten. Very few of our contacts used them alone, however, due to the amount of gristle they contain, especially at the tips.

INTERNAL ORGANS

LIVER—Most of our contacts used the liver for “liver pudding,” or “liver mush.” They made it as follows—Cut up the liver, wash it well, and remove skin. Boil until tender in salted water. Then remove and run through a colander until fine, or mash well. Mix the meat with one cup of the broth it was cooked in. Bring to a boil slowly, stirring in sifted corn meal until thick. Also stir in salt (to

taste), a half teaspoon black pepper, two tablespoons sage, and a little red pepper if desired.

Pour into a mold and let sit until cold. Slice and eat. Some eat it as a sandwich, or warm the slices in bacon fat or grease before eating.

HEART—None of our contacts used the heart by itself, but none of them threw it away, either. Some canned it after cleaning, with backbones and ribs for use later in stews. Others boiled the heart, backbone, and lights (lungs) together for stew. Still another boiled kidneys, heart, tail, and tongue together for stew.

LIGHTS (*more commonly known as lungs*)—Nowhere did we run into as much difference of opinion as with this item. One said, "It's very good—*very* good." Another said, "Lots'a folks like th' lights, but I never did." Another comment was simply, "Feed'em to th' dogs!" Those recipes we *did* get—

Boil them in just enough salted water to cover them after cleaning them well. Don't use too much water or it will steal some of their flavor. If there isn't any water left when they're done, it's better.

Cook them down to the consistency of a gravy, mash, and serve. They cannot be kept.

Another chopped up the lights with the liver and tongue, added a chopped onion, red pepper, salt, and cooked until tender.

STOMACH (*also called the "paunch" or "punch"*)—Cut the stomach free of intestines, split, and wash out well. Scrape it down and soak in salt water for three days. Then rinse, cut up, and cook like chitlins. (Most of our contacts also removed the inside layer when cutting it up prior to frying.)

INTESTINES (*called "chitterlings" or, more commonly, "chitlins."*)—Sections of the intestine are put in a jar of salt water and allowed to sit for three or four days. Then they are taken out, rinsed, washed, and rinsed again. In winter, they can be lightly salted, put up in jars, and kept for a few days before cooking.

When cooking, cut up in small pieces and remove any unwanted layers of lining. Then boil in salt water with a half pod of pepper until tender. Dip into a batter made of flour, water, and baking powder (with an egg if desired) and fry; or roll in corn meal and fry in grease.

THE REMAINDER

FEET—Rake hot coals out on the fireplace hearth. Put the feet on the hearth with the hooves against the coals. When very hot, the hooves can be sliced out of the meat easily, and the remainder of the hair scraped or singed off, and the meat scraped clean. Then put in a pot of salt water and cook, or roast.

The feet can also be boiled in salty water until the meat slips off the hooves. They can be pickled too.

Mann Norton said, "Doc Neville, now he always wanted th' feet. I'd pack'em in a shoe box just as full as I could get it and mail 'em to him."

BACKBONE/RIBS—These can either be put together and stewed like chicken parts, barbecued, or canned with a teaspoon of salt per quart can. Water is not necessary when heating as they make their own gravy.

TAIL—Often the tail was saved for use in stews. One contact made a stew of feet, ears, tail, salt, and red pepper, boiled until tender.

SKIN—The mother of one of our contacts used to save pieces of skin, put them in a pan, and roast them. Then the children could "eat it all along."

SAUSAGE—Use any combination of lean meat not used otherwise. This includes trimmings of lean meat from hams, shoulders, middlin' meat, etc. It can also include the tenderloin, meat from the head, and, if you wish, the jowls.

Take ten pounds of lean pork, a quarter cup salt, a half cup brown sugar, two tablespoons sage, two teaspoons black pepper, and two teaspoons red pepper. Many parch their own red pepper in front of the fireplace, crush it, and then add it to the sausage.

Run the mixture through a sausage grinder, fry it good and brown (but not completely cooked since it has to be reheated when served), pack into jars (half to three-quarters full) while still very hot, pour hot grease over the top, close the jars, and turn them upside down to cool. When the grease cools, it seals the lids shut, and the sausage will keep until you are ready to use it. It is usually stored with the jars remaining upside down.

Other ways to store it:

Roll the sausage into balls, pack them in a churn jar, pour hot grease over the top, tie a cloth over the lid, and set in the water trough of your spring house.

Pack the sausage in sections of cleaned, small intestine, tie the intestine off at both ends, and hang from the joists of the smokehouse for curing.

Remove the ear from a corn shuck, pack the sausage inside after washing the shuck thoroughly, tie the end of the shuck closed with string or wire, and hang in the smokehouse.

Pack in small, clean, white cloth sacks and hang in smokehouse.

FAT—The fat is trimmed from entrails, hams, shoulders, middlin', etc. It is left out all night in the lard pot so that the cold weather can solidify it and make it easier to cut up.

In the morning, the fat is cut up into pieces about the size of hens' eggs and put in a pot containing just enough water to keep it from sticking to the sides when cooked. The pot is then placed over a fire, and the fat is allowed to cook slowly. It is stirred often. By evening, the grease will have boiled out, the water evaporated, and the hard residue called "cracklin's" will have fallen to the bottom.

The grease (lard) is poured into containers, allowed to harden, and is used all winter for cooking. The cracklin's are saved for bread.

Add soda if you don’t want many cracklin’s. The soda also keeps it from smelling while cooking and from tasting strong.

RACCOON

SKINNING AND DRESSING—Many hunters cut the jugular vein and bleed the coon as soon as they have killed one to prevent the meat from spoiling. Then they either bring it home and skin it, or skin it in the field. It is done as follows:

Ring the hind legs and the front legs at the foot joint. Split the pelt on the inside middle of both hind legs from the ring to the crotch.

Repeat on front legs, splitting to the middle of the chest.

Then split the pelt up the middle of the underside from the crotch, through the split from the front legs, and up to the end of the bottom jaw.

Cut around tail on the underside *only*. Connect split. Skin out both hind legs, and make a small slice between bone and tendon and insert a gamblin' stick. Hang the coon up. Take two small sticks, and grip them together firmly so that the base of the tail is between. Pull carefully while holding the sticks tightly clamped together, and the tail will slide off the tail bone (*Illustration 13*). If you want to keep the skin, be sure not to pull the tail off.

Work the pelt off to the front legs, slicing the mesentery between skin and muscle when necessary (*Illustration 14*). Slice up to front legs, and then skin the front legs out. If you want to eat the coon, remove the two pear-shaped musk glands from under the forearms.

ILLUSTRATION 13 U. G. McCoy clamps the tail between two sticks and slides the pelt off the tail bone. The coon is hanging upside down from a gamblin' stick.

ILLUSTRATION 14 Now he works the pelt up to the shoulders slicing the mesentery, where necessary, with his pocket knife.

Skin around the neck until you get to the head (*Illustration 15*). Cut the ears off even with the head. If you make a bad ear hole, the pelt's value will be reduced by fifty cents. Skin right around the eyes leaving only the eyeballs. Then go down the snout, cutting off the end so that the nose button is still attached to the pelt.

Now split the flesh down the middle from throat to crotch and remove intestines and organs. Cut off the head, tail, and feet, and soak the carcass in cold water (preferably overnight unless you have just killed it) to get the blood out.

ILLUSTRATION 15 Carefully, he works the pelt off over the coon's head

COOKING—The most common way of cooking coon is to put it in a pot of salted water (one spoon of salt per pound), one or two pods of red pepper or one tablespoon of black pepper, and let it boil in a pot with no lid until the meat is tender. Remove, put in a greased baking pan, and bake until golden brown.

To parboil, add either broken spicewood twigs, an onion or two, a teaspoonful of vinegar, or some potatoes to the water to remove the wild taste. Take out, roll in flour, salt and pepper, and bake in a greased Dutch Oven turning the meat often. Another method is to rub the parboiled coon with salt and pepper, and dot it with butter. Place quartered sweet potatoes around the meat, and bake it in an oven at four hundred degrees until the meat and potatoes are

tender. The meat can also be parboiled, cut into pieces, rolled in corn meal, and then fried in lard.

Another contact told us that his method was to sprinkle the skinned carcass all over with salt and leave it overnight on a pan that was tipped so that as the salt drew the water out, it would drain. The next morning he packs it in ice and cools the meat, then parboils it, cuts it into two halves, and bakes it like a ham, basting it with a sauce containing poultry seasoning. Still another woman told us that rather than skinning the coon, her family always dipped the coon in boiling water to which ashes had been added to help loosen the hair. Then the coon was scraped clean, gutted, and the chest cavity filled with sweet potatoes. It was then baked until brown and tender.

Apparently it is also possible to salt the scraped, gutted carcass and smoke it like a ham for later use.

POSSUM

DRESSING—Few people in this area bother to skin the few possums they eat. The prevailing tradition is to scald the possum in boiling water containing a half cup of lime or ashes. Then it is scraped until hairless, gutted (it should have been bled immediately after caught), the musk glands under the forearms removed, and either the head or at least the eyes removed. The carcass is then soaked, preferably overnight, before cooking.

COOKING—The most common way of cooking possum is to parboil it in water containing salt and red or black pepper to taste. It is boiled until tender, and then put in a greased pan surrounded or filled with sweet potatoes. It is then baked until golden brown (about two hours if you're using a wood stove).

Another contact lines the bottom of the baking pan with sassafras sticks instead of grease. Then she bakes it. Some prefer to skin the possum, parboil the meat in salty water until tender, cut the pieces up and roll them in red and black pepper and flour and fry them in fat.

Beulah Perry said, “Lot a’times, when I was a kid, th’ possum head was my favorite, an’ my mother would always pay me to do things. And she’d say, ‘Now Beulah, if you do so and so, then I’ll leave th’ possum head on.’ And when th’ possum would get done, she’d cut that head off and give it to me. You know, as little as you think, why, they’s right smart a’meat on those. You eat th’ tongue, brains, everything in th’ head except th’ eyes.” You could also dry, salt, and smoke the carcass for later use.

RABBIT

SKINNING AND DRESSING—Some hunters in this area gut the rabbit as soon as they have killed it. Many carry it home and gut it that evening, however. They do this by making one short slash in the belly parallel to the backbone, and removing the entrails through this cut. At home they skin it, often making a cut *across* the middle of the back, inserting their fingers, and pulling both ways. The legs are lifted out of the pelt as with the squirrel.

COOKING—There are several popular ways. First cut the rabbit into sections. Remove the legs, and separate the ribs and back section by cutting up the rabbit’s sides vertically. Parboil the pieces in a covered pot in salted (two tablespoons) water to make it tender if it’s not young and tender already.

For frying, put the parboiled pieces in a greased pan and fry until brown on all sides, seasoning with a half teaspoon pepper. Some roll the pieces in meal or flour before frying.

For baking, dip the parboiled pieces in a breaded solution consisting of two eggs, four tablespoons of flour, a quarter cup milk, and a half teaspoon pepper. Put pieces in an oven and bake until brown (about thirty minutes).

Others prefer the meat simmered in the salted water until tender, and then eaten. Another contact used to make rabbit dumplings similar to those described in the squirrel section.

GROUNDHOG

DRESSING—Skin the groundhog, remove the glands from under the legs, gut, and soak overnight in salty water. The hide was often placed in a bucket of ashes over which water was poured. After the ashes had taken the hair off, the hide was removed, dried, kneaded, and cut up in strips for shoe strings.

COOKING—Parboil with spicewood twigs (to take the wild taste out) until tender. Pepper and put in a greased pan to bake until brown.

Another way is to parboil the groundhog until tender in water containing two carrots, garlic, and a piece of fat meat "about the size of a baby's fist." You can also add pepper and a tablespoon of salt if you wish. Then the groundhog is browned in an open baking pan in the oven.

The carcass could also be dried, salted, and smoked for later use.

SQUIRREL

SKINNING AND DRESSING—The most common way of skinning a squirrel in the mountains was to ring the back legs at the feet, and cut around the top of the base of the tail. The hunter then put the squirrel on its back, put his foot on its tail, grabbed its back legs firmly, and pulled. The hide would come off just like a jacket right up to the neck. Then the front legs were pulled up out of the skin and cut off at the feet, and the pelt cut off at the neck. Usually the head was not skinned out, but if you wanted to, it would be done about the same as with the coon.

Cut off the head, back feet, and tail. Then gut.

COOKING—After soaking the squirrel long enough to get all the blood out, cut it into pieces and roll the pieces in flour, salt, and pepper. Fry until tender and brown. If the squirrel is old, you may want to parboil it in water containing sage to take out the wild taste.

Another contact used to cut the squirrel into pieces after parboiling, and cook the pieces in a gravy made of milk and flour.

Another made squirrel dumplings. Cut the squirrel up and parboil the pieces for five minutes. Then remove the meat and cook it in fresh water until tender. Add to the broth a quarter teaspoon of pepper, one tablespoon of butter or cooking fat, and some milk. Prepare the dumpling dough, and cook by dropping the pieces into the boiling broth mixture. Cover and cook for ten minutes and serve hot.

BEAR

SKINNING AND DRESSING—Cut jugular vein and bleed, or cut head off. Slice down the middle of the underside from the neck to the back legs, sliding the knife between the hide and the flesh. Roll the bear from side to side while cutting until the hide is off.

With the axe, cut off the legs below the knees, cut through the breastbone, and cut between the buttocks to the backbone. Cut the end of the large intestine and strip out the innards. Cut on either side of the backbone (as in the hog) separating the meat into two halves. Cut out the hams and shoulders for curing in salt. Cut the neck, flank, and lower part of the shoulder into small pieces for stewing at once.

COOKING—Many of our contacts cooked bear roasts and steaks in the same fashion as beef or venison. One suggested parboiling the fresh meat until tender, and adding several large apples to the water. When the apples fell apart, the meat was ready to be taken out, seasoned, and baked.

DEER

SKINNING AND DRESSING—After killing, remove the scent glands (on the hind legs at the inside of the knee joint), the testes, and cut the jugular vein immediately. Then hang the carcass up by its hind legs, and ring each of the back legs below the knee. Cut down the inside of the back legs to the crotch, cut down the belly to the center of the chest, and ring the front legs in a manner similar to the back. Cut down the inside of the front legs to meet the cut in the

chest. Peel the hide off the back legs, down the body, and off the front legs up the neck to the ears. Cut off the head right behind the ears with an axe.

With the same axe, chop down between the hams. Cut from the hams to the chest with a knife, and then separate the ribs using the axe again. Cut down to the brisket with the knife, cut around the anus, and then remove the entrails. Save the heart and liver if desired.

Another method also used by local hunters was to make a diagonal cut just behind the chest cavity about twelve inches long. The entrails were removed through this cut, which was plenty large enough and yet small enough to prevent dirt and leaves from entering the cavity.

CURING—Sometimes hunters would salt the entire carcass with about twenty-five pounds of salt, let it dry, and hang it in the smokehouse. When they needed pieces, they simply stripped them off and cooked them.

Others cut the deer into pieces very similar to those that a beef is cut into (legs, ribs, rump, loin, etc.). These pieces were either dried in the sun until all the moisture was out and then put in the smokehouse; put into a fairly thick salt brine and left; or salted down (about one inch thick) and put in the smokehouse to cure in the same manner as pork.

COOKING—Before cooking meat from the smokehouse, soak the pieces overnight in clear water. If you kept them in brine, simply cook without adding salt.

For steaks from the smokehouse or brine, slice into pieces a half inch thick, four inches long, and three inches wide. In a skillet, brown in butter and simmer until tender depending on the toughness of the meat. Salt is not needed since the meat was salted during curing. For fresh steaks, roll in flour, pepper and salt until covered, and then put in a frying pan with a half cup of shortening. Fry slowly until tender, or until both sides are browned.

One woman told us to pound the steak, and soak it for an hour in a mixture of a half cup vinegar, one cup water, and a teaspoon of salt (for two pounds of steak). Remove from the liquid, dry, and roll in about a cup of flour. Season with salt, pepper, and garlic salt, and brown in shortening at a high heat. Cover, and simmer at a low heat for forty-five to sixty minutes.

For fresh roasts, some put a four-pound roast and one pod of red pepper (to kill the wild taste) in water and parboil, uncovered, until tender. The meat should be completely covered with water. When tender, take out, wipe dry, sprinkle salt and pepper to taste, and then brown in an oven.

To cook without parboiling, rub with a teaspoon each of salt and pepper, and place in a roasting pan. Add one cup water, one medium diced onion, and one half cup chopped mushrooms. Cover and bake at a low heat for around three hours.

For pot roasts, soak a four-pound roast in salt water overnight. Remove from water, dry, and rub with a mixture of one half teaspoon each salt and pepper, and one half cup flour. Heat one half cup fat, add five or six chopped onions, and brown meat on all sides. Add a cup of water, cover tightly, and cook on top of stove until tender. If you wish, add two or three chopped potatoes and carrots half an hour before the roast is done.

For venison loaf, mix together 2½ pounds ground deer meat, 1 pound ground hog meat, 2 eggs, 2 teaspoons salt, 1 teaspoon pepper, 1 large chopped onion, and 1½ cups breadcrumbs dampened with a little water. Shape into a loaf, and bake for about an hour at 400°.

For stews, cut two pounds of meat into one-inch cubes and brown on all sides in a small amount of fat. Then, in a stewing pot, add the meat, two cups water, four potatoes, six large carrots, four medium onions, one quart of tomatoes, one tablespoon salt, and one teaspoon pepper. Bring to a boil and simmer for three hours. After three hours, thicken with three tablespoons flour and one half cup water. Eat then, or store in a cool place and heat as needed. Another person told us to thicken with flour, three tablespoons bacon drippings, and a pint of tomato juice.

TURKEY

DRESSING—Most early cooks in our area scalded and plucked the turkey leaving the skin on, but one said that he skinned them many times. Then the fuzz was removed by singeing in the fire, the feet cut off at the joints, the head cut off, and the entrails removed. The latter was done either by severing the backbone from the base and pulling the entrails out through the tail end, or by cutting up the middle from the legs to the breastbone and removing them. The gizzard, liver, and sometimes the heart were saved.

COOKING—After cleaning, some then cut off the legs and breast (saving them for frying like chicken) and stewed the rest. Others rubbed the outside with lard, sprinkled it with two tablespoons of salt and one teaspoon of pepper, replaced the liver and gizzard, and baked it for about three hours on low heat. After baking, two cups of the resulting liquid were sometimes mixed in a saucepan with two tablespoons flour and a quarter cup water and heated to make gravy. Chopped liver and gizzard could be added.

Lon Reid's family used to cut off the wings, spread them out and dry them in front of the fire. When stiff, they were used as fans for the fire.

QUAIL

DRESSING—Pull the skin off the bird without bothering to pluck the feathers. Cut off the feet and head and remove the insides, saving the gizzard, heart, and liver if you wish. Rub it all over with butter, salt and pepper, place in a roasting pan, and cover. Bake in a moderate oven until tender, then uncover and let brown.

TURTLE

DRESSING—When cleaning mud turtles, most people chopped the head off first (some by holding a stick in front of the turtle, coaxing him to bite down on it, and then chopping), and then dropped it shell and all into boiling water.

Then the meat was cut loose from the shell, gutted, and cut into pieces, sometimes three inches in diameter and one inch thick, and sometimes just chunks.

Others simply skinned the turtle without boiling by cutting the bottom plate off first, then cutting between the meat and the domed shell, and then gutting the turtle, cutting off the legs, and cutting the remaining meat into pieces. Some took the meat off the legs, and cooked it along with the rest of the meat.

COOKING—The meat was soaked overnight in salty water (some with a little soda also) to remove the wild, strong taste. It was cooked according to any of the following directions:

Parboil (if desired) and roll in flour. Put three tablespoons of flour, one tablespoon salt, and one teaspoon pepper in a covered skillet, and fry the meat until brown on all sides.

After parboiling (with salt and hot pepper if desired), cool, and dip meat into a batter made of one cup plain sifted flour, one half teaspoon salt, one teaspoon baking powder, two beaten eggs, and one half cup milk. Fry in deep fat until golden brown.

Stew in sweet milk and butter, pepper and salt just like oyster stew.

FROG

Mrs. Lake Stiles: “First, after y’get’em dressed [cut the legs off and clean them and throw the rest away], get your grease not too awfully hot—if y’get it too hot, when y’put’cher legs in they’ll jump out. Roll’em in flour an’ salt an’ pepper like chicken, an’ fry’em; or either y’can take buttermilk’n’an’egg an’ whip it t’gether, and then roll th’ legs in it an’ either bread crumbs or cracker crumbs, an’ fry it.”

FISHING

"I'd like to see just one more speckled trout."

I am not a native of Rabun County, but my mother's family is. My family moved here when I was eight years old. One of the first things I came to realize about this county is the natural beauty that it holds. There are mountains and fields that have never been touched by human hands, and the numerous streams and lakes add to that beauty.

When I go fishing, I get a feeling I can't describe. There is nothing like grabbing your fishing gear and going to spend a day trying to catch one of nature's most beautiful inhabitants. It doesn't matter if I catch a fish or not; I just love trying. That is the fun for me.

The individuals interviewed for this chapter enjoy fishing too. They do it now because they want to, but during the Depression many had to fish in order to have food on the table. Years ago, they had to fish with equipment like cane poles, string, pressed-out lead for sinkers, and, in some cases, pins for hooks.

People have told us about the time when there weren't any limits on the number of fish you could catch in one day and of the times when you didn't have to have a license to fish. That was before there was a danger of some of the native fish becoming extinct. Now the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) puts limits on the number and kind of fish you can catch. The designated limits vary from state to state and can change from year to year. The DNR also stocks the streams here; the fish are raised in a hatchery and released into streams and lakes, adding to the population of that body of water. People say they can taste and see the difference between native and stocked fish. Doug Adams, former president of the Rabun County Chapter of Trout Unlimited, told me, "Stocked trout can develop the same coloring and markings as a native trout

within approximately seven months of release into a stream." The one difference is the color of the meat. Native trout have a pink color to their meat almost like that of a salmon, whereas stocked trout do not have the coloring. Their meat is whitish.

Fishing has changed a great deal since the early to mid-1900s. But many secrets and techniques of previous generations are still applicable today and have been passed down to younger generations.

My granddad Buford Garner was an avid fisherman. He took my brother fishing many times and passed on his knowledge to him. My brother, in turn, passed that on to me. I never had the chance to go fishing with my granddad, but I feel that in a way I learned from him. And I'm proud to carry on his fishing knowledge.

—Robbie Bailey

TYPES OF FISH

There are numerous species of fish in the streams and lakes of North Georgia and western North Carolina. This chart lists the most common by type, family, and common name.

BASS

Black Bass

Largemouth—Bigmouth, Bucketmouth, Black, Green, Green Trout

Smallmouth—Bronze-back

Redeye—River Trout, Shoal Bass, River Bass

White Bass

Striped Bass—Rockfish

White Bass—Striped and Silver Bass

Sunfish

Bluegill—Bream

Redbreast Sunfish—Yellowbreast Sunfish, Shellcracker
Warmouth—Rock Bass, Redeye, Goggle-eye

CRAWFISH
Crayfish, Crawdad

EEL

CARP

SUCKER
White Sucker, Redhorse, Hog Sucker

PERCH

Yellow Perch
Ringed Perch, Yellow Bass

Walleye
Walleyed Pike, Walleyed Bass

TROUT

Brook Trout
Brookie, Mountain Trout, Native Trout, Speckled Trout, Speck

Brown Trout
German Brown, Speckled Trout

Rainbow Trout
Bow

Golden Trout

PIKE

Northern Pike
Pike

Chain Pickerel
Pickerel, Pike, Jack

CATFISH

Channel Catfish

Brown Bullheads
Bullhead, Mudcat

Blue Catfish
Channel Catfish

SCULPIN
Molly Craw Bottom, Craw Bottom

MINNOW
Shiner, Dace, Darter, Chub, True Minnow

CRAPPIE
Black and White—Calico Bass, Bridge Perch

HORNYHEAD
Knottyhead

NATIVE VS. STOCKED FISH

Stock, stocked, stocker, stockard, or *hatchery fish* are fish that were spawned and raised in a hatchery on processed feed, then stocked in a stream or lake. *Wild, native*, or *original fish* are fish spawned in the stream or lake and raised in the wild on natural foods.

There are no written records of when fish were first stocked in Rabun County. Doug Adams told us that brown trout were first brought to North America in the 1880s and released in Michigan. In the 1890s they were brought to the New England area, and the South received them in the early 1900s. The Chattooga River was the first body of water in Rabun County to receive brown trout, and rainbow trout were stocked shortly after the brown trout. According to Perry Thompson of the Lake Burton Fish Hatchery, there is no documentation of when trout were first stocked in Rabun County, but the DNR started intensively stocking trout in the late 1940s to early 1950s.

L. E. Craig explained the differences in appearance of native versus stocked fish. “You can tell the difference between the native rainbow trout and the stocked rainbow by the color. The native will be kind of a brownish color with a pretty rainbow down his side. The stocked ones will be just as black as tar when they put them in the creek. They’ll have a white streak instead of rainbow colors. The stocked brown trout will be kind of black-looking. Their spots won’t show up.”

Buck Carver emphatically stated that stocked fish were not fun to catch. “When they went to stocking with them blamed pond-raised fish, that took out all the fun of fishing for me! That took all the sport out of it! They bring them out of the fish hatchery and throw them in the river, and you stand there with your pole and catch ’em out just as fast as they throw ’em in it. Anybody can catch a fish when you step up to the bank and put the hook in the water. They know something’s coming for them to eat. They seen it around them ‘raring pools’ so many times, they don’t think about getting hooked. They’re not wild, and they’re not skittish.”

Andy Cope told us it would take an expert fisherman to catch a native fish. “There are not many native fish anymore. They’re very few and far between. There are a few speckled trout deep in the

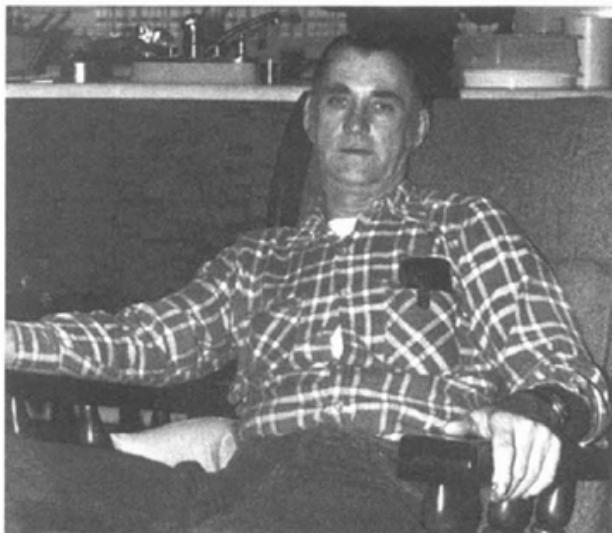

ILLUSTRATION 16 Andy Cope

heads of the streams, but so far back it's hard to get to them. To go out camping a night or two in the woods and to catch some of those speckled trout, now, you can't beat that, but as far as having a mess of fish to take home, that's a rare thing. That probably won't happen unless you're a very special trout fisherman. Just anybody can't catch them like that.

"I don't think that the native fish taste any better than a fish grown in a pond. The Game and Fish Department used to feed the hatchery fish liver, and that's what made the stocked fish in the lake mushylike. They don't feed them that anymore. They feed them pellet feed now, made from grains and fish meal."

Lawton Brooks stated, "A wild game fish is harder to catch and will put up a big fight when you get ahold of a good one. He's wild, and you'll have something on your hands. He does everything he can to break loose.

"There's a few wild trout but not too many because they have so many roads to nearly all the streams. They've got to putting them old stock trout in streams, and the wild trout are just about gone. You've got to get a way back to get you a mess of wild trout.

"I don't like to catch them stock fish too good. It's kinda interesting but not like it is to get one of those wild fish. A stock fish is one that game wardens dump in the water. Stock will bite anything you throw in to 'em."

Florence Brooks won't eat a stocked fish. "Native fish got a pretty color, and their meat is firm. Sometimes you'll catch these stock fish, and they'll turn white-spotted before you get 'em home. Their meat's real soft. They keep 'em in these big vats, and they feed 'em chicken feed before they turn them loose in the lakes. The native fish don't do that. They just eat what they can catch, and they are

stronger, firmer, meat and all. The minute those stock fish that I've caught turn white-spotted, I throw 'em away. I don't like them white spots."

According to Parker Robinson, "Fishing is my favorite sport. I really love to trout fish, but it's hard work. I'd rather catch them than the others, but it's rough. This day and time you have to get off the road a little and out away where people don't fish so much. I go down the creek kind of in the roughs, and I catch some pretty nice trout. Natives [trout] are smart fish, 'specially if they've been fished after. Rainbow is the best eating trout, I guess."

Talmadge York explained to us, "German brown trout were brought here and stocked. Same way with rainbow, brook, bream, and bass. They were brought in and stocked in the lakes. They used to stock some brown trout here, raise 'em over at the hatchery and stock 'em, but they didn't do well in these small streams.

"Brown trout are sharp fish. They can see you a long way off. They'll put up a fight, and they'll get off your hook after you've caught 'em. Brown trout have big red spots on them, from their tails to their heads, about the size of dimes when they get to be about twenty-three inches long. Just as red and pretty as you've ever seen."

L. E. Craig said, "And a lot of people call a brown trout a speckled trout. Brown trout are, but they're not the original speckled trout. I can tell one just as quick as I see it. The brown will be kind of black-looking. Their spots won't show up. A brown trout is pretty, and if you ever see a big brown, it'll have red spots on it."

Willie Underwood reminisced, "The first rainbow trout in this section here was shipped here in a barrel when I was six or seven years old. Now there are rainbow in nearly all the streams."

KINDS OF TROUT

"Mountain trout spawn in February and rainbow generally in the spring [February to April]. You ain't supposed to be fishing then," Parker Robinson said. "You take these mountain trout here. Now they'll have a winter coat on them. They don't have scales on them.

ILLUSTRATION 17 Willie Underwood

It's right along now, the beginning of February, when they begin to lay eggs, and they're getting a thick coat on them. If you catch two when they're like that, and let them be against one another and they dry a bit, it's just like glue. You can hardly pull 'em apart, and you can hardly get that coat off of there when you're trying to clean them. I never would eat 'em when they had that coat on them, that spawning coat that mountain trout have."

Talmadge York told us, "We used to fish in these little ol' trout streams for specks. Original specks [native speckled trout] won't get but about six inches long. That's all. They don't have no scales on them at all. They're just as slick as a catfish."

Willie Underwood shared with us his feelings about why there aren't many speckled trout left in Rabun County. "The speckled trout is a small species. They don't have scales but do have little specks on them. There are only a few in the streams because they have to have more oxygen than anything else. It's got to be pure, clear water. The speckled trout are a thing of the past. There has been so much pollution in this clear water, and the lakes have been fished so heavy, the speckled trout are just nonexistent now. Speckled trout cannot compete with the fish that eat one another."

L. E. Craig agreed with Willie Underwood. "I don't know where a creek in this country is that's got any speckled trout. They can't stand for one bit of mud, silt, or anything [to be in the water]. I'd like to see just one more speckled trout. They are the best eating fish. A lot of people call brown trout a speckled trout, but they're not."

Andy Cope, who owned a trout fishing resort, told us, "Brown trout is a stream trout. It's not a good trout to grow in lakes and

ponds. They bite slower than the other trout, and that's why there are some large brown trout caught in our streams. The main Betty's Creek stream is stocked with brown trout by the Game and Fish Department."

Jake Waldroop explained, "The brown trout doesn't have any scales, and he's brown all over. I've fished for the brown trout. They grow big. I caught one out there in the creek by my house that weighs three and a half pounds. Got him in the freezer right now."

FISHING EQUIPMENT

The fishing equipment of today is fancy but fairly easy to use. Yet it wasn't always easy to get fishing equipment. Some people made their own fishing poles out of cane or bamboo, their lines out of horsehair or string, and their sinkers from a piece of lead beaten out thin and folded around their line. People back then had it hard just to go fishing.

Willie Underwood explained the basic equipment. "Our fishing poles would be made out of creek canes, alder bushes, sourwood, or whatever we had.

"Fly rods have been around for years, but they wasn't used in this area until after the Depression. Fly rods was for people that had money. People didn't have them much around here because they couldn't afford them. I was forty years old when I got my first fly rod, and I bought it myself."

Melvin Taylor told us, "My daddy used a cane pole, and that's what I started fishing with. The people that had a lot of money had a reel and rod. The rest had cane poles, which you can find on creek banks.

ILLUSTRATION 18 “My daddy used a cane pole, and that’s what I started fishing with.”—Melvin Taylor

“Daddy caught bass that weighed eight and a half pounds with a cane pole. That’s the biggest fish I could remember. It came out of Burton Lake. Boy! They put it in a tub at that store on display. That one was a whopper on a cane pole! That’s the biggest I’ve ever heard of.”

Andy Cope said, “We would make our fishing poles out of birch saplings. We’d cut a birch sapling and peel the bark off it, then hang it up by the fire and let it dry. When it was dry, we would use it for a fishing pole. Sometimes folks who lived in an area where there was a river would get river cane poles. Where I grew up, there wasn’t any river cane.”

“Years ago, I used to fish with a cane pole—only thing we had to fish with,” L. E. Craig remembered. “There wasn’t much bamboo in

this country, but you could buy 'em at almost any store for a dime—big, long-tipped ones. Boy! You could catch bass on that thing that weighed two or three pounds. You talk about sport! It was! Have your line just about as long as your pole.

"I used to go down to Seed Lake in a boat and catch eighteen or twenty bass in a couple of hours. Bream could make your line whistle if they got on your pole. A few people had level winding reels to cast for bass."

Jake Waldroop said, "We would make our own fishing poles. Mostly, we would get out there and hunt us a little straight hickory. Hemlock, black gum, and hickory was hard to get. I would always prefer a cane if I could get it. Cane is almost like bamboo.

"I have made lots of cane poles. We would go to the Little Tennessee River and cut sometimes ten or fifteen of them, take them home, and hang them up by a string in the barn. We would cut them off the length we wanted them and tie a great big rock, three or four pounds, to them and let them hang there. Keep 'em from crooking up. Keeps 'em straight as a gun barrel and makes good fishing poles. If you didn't hang 'em up and put a weight on them, they would be warped. The pole should be a little bit bigger than my thumb by the time it's through hanging up. The tip will be as little as a knitting needle, but it will be strong. We could always get them from eight to ten feet long. A cane pole is hard to beat!"

Talmadge York reminisces, "Back when I was a boy, we made our line. We'd take a spool of thread and double it and beeswax 'em. And then we used to use what they called a silk line. You could buy lines made of silk before plastic came out."

Willie Underwood told us, "We used to use sewing thread off a spool for fishing string. It would break easy, so you would have to double and twist it. Sometimes we'd twist it four times because the lines weren't that long. We just had poles. We didn't have any reels to put it on. We'd buy standard fishing hooks at the store, but we didn't have fishing floats like we do now."

Minyard Conner said, "I can remember when I used to fish with horsehair for a line. All you would have to do to it was twist some horsehairs together. You had to have a good smooth place to make

ILLUSTRATION 19 Minyard Conner

'em. Put them horsehairs on your leg and rub them. That'll twist 'em together, and then when you want to set another one in there, just stick it in and keep a-rolling. They just roll on out there—make it as long as you want—and not have a knot in it. It'll hold too, about three or four horsehairs twisted together. Some of them would put four or five horsehairs together to catch a big fish. A three-horsehair line will catch a twelve-inch rainbow. I'd say it's six-pound test leader.

"Put a sinker on your horsehair line to fish underwater. A horsehair won't tangle up like your other lines. If you throw it over a limb, it might wrap around it three or four times, but you give it a little pull, and it'll unravel by itself, and it's straight. You take a cotton string and throw it around a limb, and it ties right there."

Jake Waldroop recalled, "Sometimes we would buy hooks and tie them to the line, and sometimes we'd get them already made with the leader tied to them. Sometimes it's faster getting the hook out of the fish's mouth, if you can fish with bait with a sinker. 'Cause if they're bitin' good, when he grabs the bait, he'll just swallow hook and bait plumb down, and I have had to tear a fish's whole mouth open to get the hook out."

Leonard Jones told us about an alternative to using store-bought hooks. "I know one feller that said he wasn't never able to buy him no hooks. He'd fish with a straight pin. He'd bend it, you know. It didn't have that barb, and when he hooked one, he had to throw it out on the bank. If he didn't, it'd come off, and he'd lose it."

Leonard also explained how to make homemade sinkers. “Before they got to making sinkers, you’d just get you a piece of lead, cut it in strips, beat it out right thin, and then roll it around the line. You can buy any size sinkers now, great big ones or small ones. You want a sinker on it if you’re fishing with bait, but if you’re fishing with a fly, you don’t.”

Andy Cope recalls, “We used store-bought hooks, but we made our own sinkers out of shot from a shotgun shell. It was folded and put in a big spoon and melted on a fire. That run the lead together. Then we’d hammer the lead out flat and cut it into little pieces and roll it around fishing line for sinkers.”

Talmadge York told us how to fix up a trotline. “To make a trotline, first tie the hooks to two-foot lengths of string. Then tie these to a long piece of binder twice about six or eight feet apart to keep the hooks from getting tangled up. Then go to a good root or something on the edge of the lake and tie one end of the line to that. Take your boat across the lake, maybe a hundred yards, somewhere where the lake’s not too wide, and have the other end of your line tied to a big rock. If you don’t tie the string to a big rock, it’ll stay right on top. Put it down to where it’ll be four or five foot under the water.

“I have set ’em and gone back the next morning, and every bait was still on. You work two or three hours to fix one up and set it and then go back and don’t get nothing—that’s hard work. I just quit fooling with it.”

Leonard Jones explained what to do with the fish you catch. “I use a stringer instead of a chain to put the fish I catch on. All you do is run the line up through the gills and out their mouths. The first one that you put on, you’ve got to run it back through, make a ring. The rest is just strung through the gills and out the mouth without having to make the ring. You carry your stringer along with you, but most of the time you’re setting down somewhere. So just throw your fish out in the water and take the end that has the sharp metal cover and stick it down in the ground. That’ll hold ’em.”

BAIT

“Trout will eat crawfish,” L. E. Craig told us. “If you ever clean a trout of any size, and you don’t find one in him, there’s something wrong. Nearly any kind of fish will bite a crawfish. If he sees one, he wants to get him. Boy! It hurts to get bit by a crawfish.”

Minyard Conner informed us that “minnows are good bait, but they don’t live long.” Talmadge York added, “I used to fish in the lake with minnows, and I fished for crappie with them. I reckon minnows are the only thing crappies will bite.”

Lots of fishermen think red worms are the best bait. Jake Waldroop told us, “Red worms are good bait. Sometimes I have caught six fish with one red worm. I’ve tried them all, and red worms are the best.” Buck Carver believes that “trout will all bite red worms in the wintertime and the early spring, but not all year round. They’ll go for flies a lot of the year.” Melvin Taylor told us, “Bass bites red worms and night crawlers real well in the spring. They’re better than a lizard anytime.” And Lawton Brooks said, “Red worms are pretty good for wild trout. Just regular earthworms. Them little ol’ speckled trout—you can catch them with those worms. Just pitch a little ol’ worm over there where the water ain’t real deep. He’ll come up and bite that worm, and you don’t know where he come from.”

Willie Underwood recalled, “We’d catch those ol’ black crickets that you see in the fields, but that was hard to do. They’re good for trout.”

Carl Dills told us about flies used by fishermen. “These old mountain people calls ’em stick bait, but the regular name for them is caddis fly. They live among sticks and rocks in the edge of the creek, and you just pull them out.”

Lots of fishermen preferred night crawlers. Blanche Harkins told us how her sons caught them. “My sons uses night crawlers and red worms. Night crawlers come out at night, and fishermen catch ’em. They’re just like red worms but a whole lot larger. The later at night they wait to catch them, the more they come out. If you wait till real late, they’ll be out on top of the ground, and you can just pick them up. You use a flashlight, and if you don’t dim your light, they jump back in their holes.”

Parker Robinson explained how to create a "bed" for night crawlers. "You can make a place in your yard to raise night crawlers by putting your food peels in a pile. That dirt's gonna be rich where you have all that stuff, and your worms will come to that."

Willie Underwood told us to "burn a hornets' nest or yellow jackets' nest and get the young larvae. They make awful good bait, but they're tender enough that if you don't catch your fish when he first hits that bait, you'll have to bait your hook again."

ILLUSTRATION 20 Carl Dills

Talmadge York told us about some of the different baits he uses. "I have got these little fellers [hellgrammites] out from under rocks and fished for trout with 'em. They'll sting you if you don't catch 'em just right. They look like a great big worm. We used them for when we trawled for bass. You can find what they call stretcher worms in the edge of the water."

Jack Waldroop recalled using mayflies as bait. "That's a fly that's down in the water. When he begins to come on top of the water and starts trying to fly, them fish come up to eat him. I've seen seventy-five to one hundred fish coming up at one time for those flies when they started hatching out. If you put a different kind of bait in there when the mayflies are in season, the fish won't strike as much. Just about all fish like mayflies."

Buck Carver reminisced about using wood sawyers. "The best luck I've had on a sinker or an eagle claw snail was these big ol' white sawyers that you get out of trestle timber. Used to, they would repair these railroad tracks and would throw out the old timber, and

them of big sawyers would get in there. A sawyer is a termite-type worm. They'll be anywhere from a quarter of an inch to three or four inches long. Sometimes you can find them in rotten pine logs."

Another kind of worm used was the catawba worm. Minyard Conner told us, "The old catawba worms that are on the catawba trees—they're good bait. You'll never find the catawba worms on any other tree, just that certain kind."

Talmadge York agreed that those worms were good bait, especially for bream. "Old pea trees is what we call the trees they grow off of. There's another name for them but we always called 'em a pea tree. They have big of long peas on 'em. Bream bite catawba worms pretty good. Take a little stick or match and turn him wrong side outward. Take his head and push him plumb through. When he turns out, he's white. They'll bite him better white than green. If you fish with them, you usually catch big bream. Little ones won't fool with 'em."

Many fishermen used lizards for bait. Talmadge York recalled, "I have fished with what they call a red dog. It's a type of lizard except he's redder, like blood. They are good to fish with for bass. We used to go spring lizard hunting and stay out 'til twelve or one o'clock if we were going fishing the next day. You'd tear your fingers all to pieces scratching under rocks and catching them with a flashlight. Them spring lizards are awful good bait for bass if you fish slow with 'em. You get more big ones that way because the little ones don't pay much attention to the lizards."

L. E. Craig told us he used spring lizards to catch the biggest fish he ever caught. "I like to use spring lizards for bait. I don't like artificial bait. The largest fish I ever caught weighed seven and a half pounds, and I was using spring lizards. I've caught lots of trout with little-bitty lizards about two inches long. Bream and trout bite them small lizards you get out of a spring. Them ol' lizards live for half a day almost."

Jake Waldroop described using chicken parts for bait. "A good thing to bait your hook with for trout is chicken innards. Just throw a great big wad of them out in the water. Directly a fish will come

and get 'em and start dragging them off. All you got to do is drag your fish out."

Corn is commonly used here to attract stocked fish. Jake Waldroop recalled, "Corn is good bait. Put a little red worm on a hook and then put a piece of corn on after it. Throw your line out there, and the stocked fish will come right for it. You can catch them better than natives with corn. The natives don't care too much about that corn."

Talmadge York told us, "Here, lately, the stocked fish bite corn better than anything, whole-kernel corn. The reason they bite this whole-kernel corn is because they've been fed on pellets, and they're used to that."

Many fishermen debate the use of artificial or real bait. Talmadge York told us, "I'd rather use artificial bait because it's less trouble. Fish bite 'em just as good. At times, I believe they hit 'em better. I've been fishing with boys that's been fishing with 'em while I was using live bait, and they'd catch 'em out of a hole where I wouldn't."

Carl Dills disagreed. "Fish go after live bait better than they do artificial bait. It's like if you went down here to the cafe, and you ordered a steak and they brought you a hot dog, you'd tell them you wouldn't take it. A fish is smart. They don't grow up to be twenty, twenty-five inches biting every hook that comes along either. They get smart as they grow. A big trout hardly ever feeds himself of a night. Once in a while, he'll bite, usually if you use a big enough tackle to hole 'im."

Other fishermen change bait as needed, depending on what the fish are biting. Buck Carver said, "When you find a good fishing hole, and one day you come down there and throw your hook in, and they don't bite, you know that they've got tired of the same ol' thing. Fish are just like women—they change their minds all the time."

ILLUSTRATION 21 “When you find a good fishing hole, and one day you come down there and throw your hook in, and they don’t bite, you know that they’ve got tired of the same ol’ thing.”—Buck Carver

FISHING BY THE SIGNS

Many of the old-timers believe the signs of the zodiac play a part in whether or not the fish will bite. Buck Carver recalled, “Different times of the moon makes a lot of difference when you’re fishing. When the sign is in the heart, they will bite better than usual.

“I tell you what you can do at home. Find a bottle like a small Coca-Cola bottle that’s round and fill it to the top with water. Place the bottle upside down into a glass. When the water in the bottle rises in the glass up to the neck of the bottle, get your hooks and go!”

Leonard Jones doesn’t follow the signs when fishing. “Lots of people go by the signs of the moon, but I never did pay it much attention, just to be honest with you. I go anytime. There’s days you can go out there, and I don’t care what kind of bait you’ve got. They won’t bite. There’s times you can go, and they’ll bite like anything.

Now, I don't know what causes it, whether it's the signs or what. Lots of people notices the signs to a great extent. I never did pay much attention to them."

Talmadge York agreed. "I don't go by the signs. But now I believe that on a dark night is the best time to fish. I don't mean to fish on the dark night, but just that time of the month when the moon is not shining bright. It seems like when there is a light night, the fish feed all night, and they're not hungry the next day. They take it by spells. When they're feeding, you couldn't catch a one. It'd be just like there's not a fish in the water."

FISHING TECHNIQUES

All the people we talked to had different ideas about the way they caught fish and what worked best for them. We asked each fisherman to tell how he caught the kinds of fish he does and any methods he recommends.

Lawton Brooks told us, "Crappie will bite in one place for a while, and then they'll quit. They move a lot. They move in schools like white bass. If you get in a bunch of crappie, and they start biting good, the first one you catch in the lip where it won't hurt him, ease him up and cut the line, leaving your hook in him. Cut you off a little bit of leader and tie it to a lightbulb and just drop it back in the water, and he'll stay with the gang. Watch where the lightbulb goes, and just take your boat and follow him. Just keep a-catching them because he will follow the gang of crappies, and you will know where the fish are.

"I'll tell you about a catfish. He's so slow about biting. Maybe you'll set there for hours before one ever bites. Maybe you'll catch one, and sometimes you'll be there the rest of the day and night and not catch nothing. I haven't caught but two catfish in my life in the daytime. Caught one of them out of Hiawassee Lake and caught the other one down here above Tallulah Falls. I went down to Tugalo one time with another feller and caught a bunch of little catfish about four inches long. It wasn't interesting. They was too small to eat."

“Anytime my wife will let me go fishing is the best time to go,” Carl Dills declared. “When I get all my work done and she’ll let me —that’s the best time. You take one of the dark nights. The fish will bite better in the daytime than they will of a light night. I reckon they feed more when the moon is shining all night long than they do of a dark night.

“When it’s raining, it washes out the food into the water, and they’ll go to feeding. There’s a certain time a fish will go to feeding, and other times you swear there wasn’t a fish in the creek. Then in maybe ten minutes, there’s fish everywhere you look.

“You take a catfish. It feeds by smell, and they’ll bite when the water’s muddy quicker than when it’s clear. A bass or a trout feeds by sight, not by smell alone, and they bite better when the water’s clear. Dark water that’s dingy, though, and using night crawlers, trout will bite ’cause they’re looking for worms that’s washed in the water from a heavy rain. They’re out there looking for ’em.”

Parker Robinson revealed some of the secrets to his successful fishing. “I like to use two fishing poles because I’ll be trying to catch one on one pole and maybe another one would bite the other. I like to fish from land because I can catch more fish, but they’re about the same size you’d catch from a boat. I don’t like to fish in the wintertime because you can’t catch much. You can catch more fish when it’s not raining, but it don’t matter if it’s cloudy.”

Buck Carver informed us, “When you get to the headwaters of these little trout streams, and the water is extremely clear, I like to wade downstream because that stirs up the mud, and fish in their holes can’t see you. You can catch more going downstream than you will going up.

ILLUSTRATION 22 “I like to use two fishing poles, because I’ll be trying to catch one on one pole and maybe another one would bite the other.”—Parker Robinson

“When you’re fishing for native trout, fish uphill. There’ll be one laying out on guard duty at the bottom of the hole. If you can, slip up behind him and throw out the hook above him and let it drift down to him. If you can get that one on guard duty, you’ll be able to catch two or three more out of that same hole. But if he sees you and sails into that hole, you’re lucky if you get any of ’em ’cause he comes in there so fast, the rest of ’em knows that he’s done set the alarm. They ain’t fools. If one comes in there like a scalded dog, the others in that hole knows there’s a dead cat on the line somewhere.”

Leonard Jones stated, “A good time to go fishing is when it’s raining, if you [don’t mind] getting wet. They’ll bite as good or

better than they will any other time. I think maybe the rain causes the water to rise, and they learn that when the water rises, it washes in stuff for them to eat. When it commences to raining, they get to stirring around, and the more they stir, the apter you are of catching them.

"You take the bream. They go in droves around. Maybe you'll catch several right now, and then they'll be gone for a while, then come back around, and you'll catch another bunch. They don't stay long at the same place. Now, a big ol' trout, if he's got a certain hole in the river, he'll stay there most of the time in that same place.

"You should go fishing early of a morning or late of a evening. You can catch trout or catfish at night. From daylight 'til nine in the morning, you'll catch more fish than you will the rest of the day 'til about five or six that evening. Any kind of fish will bite a heap better early of a morning or late of a evening. They don't bite too awful good at noon. They'll bite some along and along all day. When it gets on up about the Fourth of July when it gets real hot, they don't bite good at all. They'll bite in the winter if you can stand to stay out there and fish, but you freeze to death. I caught bream one time up yonder on Bear Creek Lake 'til I got so cold baiting my hook that I got to where I didn't have no feeling nearly in my hands. Every time I'd throw my hook in, one would bite it. I just kept fishing 'til I froze myself good before I quit.

"In the wintertime, fish eat anything they can get. If a lake has been down and rises, why, that washes in a lot of food."

Melvin Taylor believes the best time to fish is when it's calm. "I don't remember me doing much good when it was cloudy with the wind blowing and white clouds in the sky, but that's the time my daddy said was best. I say the best time is when it's clear and calm. The spring of the year or fall is better than any other time for bream fishing.

"A good place to fish is where the stream runs into another one. In the spring of the year, they're looking for a place to bed. That's when you'll catch most of the trout. They bed on a full moon, when it's warm. They'll be out in the shallow water, so you just travel out 'til you find their beds. Then stop and fish until they stop biting.

They'll just bite for so long. Then you just crank up and find another bed. You can see the beds in early morning, but still you can see them plain as day in shallow water in the evening.

"Bream fish, that's my favorite kind of fishing. One thing about it, you can always catch one of them. They bed on every new moon. In the spring of the year, you get some red worms and go on a new moon and ride around in your boat until you find a bed. If you find them in a bed, you can catch them.

"When you're out there, you don't necessarily have to be quiet, but the aluminum boats have to be pretty still because of the vibrations from them. The bass, they won't hear you coming up. You can just about run across them. I've ran right over a bed and not even seen them.

"A good time to go catfishin' is when it's dark. They go to feeding then."

Jake Waldroop shared his fishing techniques. "It's better to catch fish early in the morning or late in the evening. Now, rainbow bite better of a night than of a day. I remember the time when they would just eat you up at night.

"I would rather fish upstream when fly-fishing. When you're fishing upstream, just let your line float back downriver.

"It don't take a person long to learn how to catch a fish. By the time you go fishing four or five times, you get along pretty good. You can just sit on the side of the bank and fish out in the water and catch them. Let your hook come around the edge of the bank. He'll be laying back under there. He'll run out and grab it. You take that net, and when you hook one out in the water somewhere, you can pull him up to you on the pole and reach out with the net and get it under him. Lots of times, if you don't have that net, he will float off the hook.

"You have to throw them back in now if they're under seven inches long. It doesn't hurt a fish much usually, but if you hook him pretty deep, you just might as well throw him on the bank. If you just catch him in the lips, you can throw him back in.

"I've had a lot of fish to get away. If you can miss him, that's about it. If you hook him a little, you can tell it, you can feel it. If he

struck at your hook, if you didn't snag him, he may not come back again. About nine times out of ten, you will miss one.

"When I was a boy, and we went fishing, we had to walk about four miles, but when we got over there, we fished for about two hours and then went back home. Sometimes we would go and stay all night. When we did that, we would just fix us a mess for supper and breakfast. Then after breakfast, we would go back and catch us some fish to bring home with us. Sometimes we went on Monday morning and didn't come back 'til Saturday. We would stay a whole week at a time.

"You don't have to be too quick when the water is right clear. It's best for you to keep the bushes between you and the hole you fish in. Back then, there was so many they couldn't help from biting. They didn't pay much attention to you. It still don't take too long to catch a fish. I just walk up to a hole, have my hook baited, and throw it in. Jerk it right back out of that. Those trout, when they bite, they really come after it. You don't have to wait on them too long."

FAVORITE FISHING HOLES

"My favorite place to fish is down on the Chattooga River," said Talmadge York. "Anywhere you can get to in the Chattooga is a good place. Sara's Creek is a good place in the summertime. There's so many people fishing there now that there ain't many fish left. For the last few years, me and my wife have camped up there at Sara's Creek—stay a week at a time. When they stock 'em up there, you can catch 'em right when they first put 'em in. We always catch our limit. Have enough to do us. It ain't so much fun catching them stocked ones as it is catching the wild ones, though."

Melvin Taylor prefers lake fishing. "The best fishing place is Lake Rabun. If you want to catch fish—fish Lake Rabun. They've got 'em all. It's the best fishing place you'll find. If you want to catch bream, you go to Lake Rabun anytime in warm weather up into October and November. In fact, I caught a mess down there during deer season."

Florence Brooks prefers fishing in streams. “I’d rather fish in a stream because you can just catch them better, and then I just like stream fishing. We used to walk from Rabun Gap to the head of Betty’s Creek and then fish back down. We’d catch a pile of fish! Walk along, and if you feel something, jerk it. But in a lake, you just stand still, wait for them to get on, then jerk it. I fish right around here, all over Rabun County, just anywhere I can get a hook in the water.”

ILLUSTRATION 23 Florence and Lawton Brooks holding their fishing trophies

Lawton Brooks agrees with his wife. “I like to fish anywhere there’s a good stream. I like to fish streams better than I do lakes because there is more sport in it. Just get in there with them. Trout have more action. Give you more sport.”

Jake Waldroop said, “I never did have a favorite fishing hole. Everybody could locate them just as well as I could. There is lots of rivers that runs right under these mountains here. There’s Long Branch, Park Creek, Kimsey Creek [North Carolina]. I would rather fish in them than any other. I have caught lots of fish from them.”

Minyard Conner told us, “I like to fish almost anywhere. I don’t like fishing in trout farms much. I’d rather fish after a trout where it’s raised out in the wild where you just have to outwit him to get him. If he sees the shadow of your pole, he’ll run. He knows something dangerous is on hand.”

CLEANING FISH

Leonard Jones explained, “It depends on what kind of fish you have as to how you clean it. If they’re small, take a trout for instance, I just scrape them good, take their innards out, and cut their heads and fins off.

“You have to skin a catfish. It ain’t got no scales on it. Cut it around the neck, split it down the back and stomach, and take a pair of pliers and pull that skin off. You can skin ’em just about as quick as you scrape ’em. If I catch a great big fish of any kind, I skin it. Small ones, I don’t.”

Minyard Conner told us, “To clean a speckled trout, just take a knife and split him open and take his guts out. Then he’s ready to cook.”

Buck Carver said, “The rainbow and the brown trout have scales, and you have to scrape them. Though the speckled trout has scales, they’re so fine you needn’t try to scale him. All you do is rub that slime off with some sand.”

COOKING OR PRESERVING FISH

Minyard Conner stated, “There are a lot of ways you can cook trout—bake ’em, fry ’em, or stew ’em. First, you cut their heads off and clean ’em. Now, these stockards [stocked fish], I’d stew ’em and take the bones out and make fish patties out of them because their meat’s too tender to hold together to fry.

“To bake a fish, you coat them with a little grease and lemon juice. Heat your oven to about 350 degrees and cook ’em about thirty minutes.”

Florence Brooks told us, “Mama used to fry fish for us for breakfast. Nowadays I usually give away what I catch, because we don’t eat fish. When I do cook them, I just roll the fish in cornmeal and a little salt and fry them in grease on the stove. Some people can’t eat fried fish, but my kids just like them fried brown. They eat them that way with hush puppies.”

Minyard Conner revealed, “I’ve eat fish eggs! I’ve caught a lot of big fish with big rolls of eggs under them. Boy, I like them! That’s caviar! That’s good!”

Blanche Harkins stated, “Trout are easy to cook. I scrub them with a scrub pad or dishrag gourd to get the slime off. Then I cut their heads off and cut their stomachs open to take their innards out. Then I wash ’em again and roll them in cornmeal. I have a big black frying pan that I put Crisco in and get it hot enough to smoke. I turn the heat down some and brown them about ten minutes on either side, and they’re ready to eat.”

ILLUSTRATION 24 Blanche Harkins

Jake Waldroop told us, “Before we had a freezer, we had some cool springs, and we would put any fish we weren’t going to cook right then in a bucket or half-gallon jars and stand them under those springs where the cold water would run over them. We could keep them for four or five days or more.”

Minyard Conner recalled, “Well, I was raised with the Indians. They wouldn’t do like the white man. You know, catch too many of anything and have to throw ’em away. They’d just catch what they could eat, and that’s all they took. If they could eat ten, then that’s all they took. They didn’t usually try to preserve them. They didn’t do a thing with ’em.”

“THE BIGGEST FISH I EVER CAUGHT”

Florence Brooks related, “The biggest fish I ever caught lacked one inch from being two feet long. It’s been ten or fifteen years ago, I guess, when we lived at Dillard. I caught a brown trout right about Betty’s Creek Bridge. It was as long as my arm and weighed four pounds and a half. I was using an ol’ cane pole, and my line had been on there no telling how long.

“They all took a fit when I caught that fish—thought somebody was a-drowning! I had it caught deep in its throat, and it couldn’t cut up a bit. I just drug it to the bank. Lawton [her husband] and Kent Shope got down in the water and lifted it up on the bank with their hands.”

Minyard Conner stated, “The biggest fish I ever caught was a twenty-four-inch rainbow over in Smokemont, in the Smokies [North Carolina]. I have fished all year long and maybe not caught one fish over a foot long. I seen one over there in the Smokies that was thirty-six and a half inches long that they’d caught in the Pigeon River.”

Talmadge York recollected, “I never had a really big fish that got away. One maybe twelve or fifteen inches long got off before I could get him out of the water. About the biggest fish I ever caught was a twenty-three-inch brown trout. I caught a blue cat one time that weighed nine pounds. I guess the biggest bass we ever caught was about a six-pounder.”

“I’VE HEARD, WHAT GROWS THE FASTEST OF ANYTHING IN THE WORLD IS A FISH AFTER IT’S CAUGHT ’TIL YOU TELL ABOUT IT.”

The first thing we thought about when we decided on an entire chapter dedicated to fishing were the stories fishermen are reputed to tell. The main focus of all our interviews was probably "Do you know any good fishing stories?"

Some of these are events that happened to people as they fished, or stories that had been told to them about people fishing, or stories they know about other fishermen. Some of the stories are exciting; some are funny; some are kind of hard to believe but are said to be true; and some are just informative.

Lawton Brooks told us, "I found this fish, oh, I guess four or five months ahead of the time I caught him. But I couldn't get him to hit nothing. I tried everything. My wife'd catch lizards, and we'd try those. I didn't tell nobody where I fished at. It was right down the railroad going by our house. The creek went right in beside the mountain there, hit a big rock, and turned back right under the rock there. It was right deep, and it was swift through there. It might be that when you put your bait in there, it went by too fast for him to catch it. He didn't want to fool with it or something.

"I'd slip down there sometimes and see him out. I'd look over in there, and sometimes he'd be in a deep hole. I'd go to the house and tell Florence, my wife, 'I'm gonna catch him.'

"So they started a revival meeting down there at the church below the house. One evening—it was the prettiest evening to fish—I went out there, and I fished and I fished, and fooled around and caught me a little ol' crawdad. I cut his head off, hooked him on that hook, and had me a line—I mean a stout'un. I had me a big ol' cane pole, long as from here to the door yonder, and I put that thing on that pole. I put me on a great big ol' beaten-out piece of lead, and I rolled it around there.

"I throwed that line right on over in there with that crawdad, and I went on off to church. I put the pole up under a rock and stuck it in the bank. We come on back, and he'd bit my line. He was on there!

"I tell you what I done. I'd pull him out from under that rock, and he'd go back. And I'd get him back out, and he'd go back under. He'd swallowed the plug I had on the line way down. There wasn't

no way he could have got loose without he broke the line all the way because he'd done got it down past that tough place in his throat here. If it ever got below there, it'd pull his head off, and he'd still come out of there, or he'd come out dead. He ain't gonna get that hook out. As long as you've just got him up here in the mouth, he can throw 'em out. But I know he swallowed that thing, for I had it hooked right through both his lips, and I knowed he'd have to swallow the whole hook, and sure 'nough, he had.

"I fooled with that ol' rascal a long time, pulling him in and out. Thedro Wood come up. He had his arm broke, had it in a sling. He said, 'What's the matter here?'

"I said, 'I'm trying to get this big fish outta here. I've got a big'un under here. You watch 'im in a minute.'

"Boy! I brought him out of there, and back he'd go. Thedro said, 'Yea, God! What a fish!' He said, 'Next time bring him plumb on out in those bushes. Bring him out on this sandbar, and I'll catch 'im.'

"I brought him out there, and he went back in. The next time I started with him, I just took right on out through yonder just a-runnin' with my pole, draggin' him. Sure enough, he come out on the sandbar, and Thedro fell down on top of him. He said, 'Come in here. I've got it. He's under me here.' Says, 'Just reach under there and get it. He's under there. I'm on top of it.'

"So I reached around under there, and I finally got to his head and got right up in his gills, and I said, 'We got 'im now.' I forgot how long he was, but boys, he was a whopping fish! And no telling how long he'd been in that creek. And everybody had fished by him. I'd been a-fishing by him for over a year before I ever knowed he was in there. Of course, I bet he'd laid right there in that same place.

"I had my pole back in under a bank, just as far back as I could drive it in the bank. I fixed it a purpose, so if he did get on there, I meant to have him. I got a line that I bet would have held fifty pounds and tied on that cane pole! And I wrapped the line way down the pole, so if he broke the end of the pole, I'd still have him down near to the bottom of it."

Florence Brooks recalled, “I was fishing over there above Lake Burton, right down in the mouth of Timpson Creek. I put my plug out there, and I whipped one. I was bringing it in, and all at once, it got a whole lot heavier. I said, ‘My word, he must be an awful big one!’ He come out, and I saw that a bigger fish had the one I caught in his mouth. I had two hooks on my line, and the other fish was caught by that one. I come out with two of ’em.

“One time when I was fishing up yonder on Burton Lake on a bridge, I saw a pretty hole way up across there, and I just drew back and threw my hook under there. I hooked something, and it broke loose. Since Lawton was fishing above there, I just thought, ‘Doggone it, he’s caught my fish!’ And I swear, I liked to have caught a deer in the nose!

“It was in that water covered up, all but its nose sticking out. I thought it was a rock. When I got it in the nose, it jerked loose and got out of the water and left there. It’s the truth! It tickled Lawton to death. This was last summer. I knew it was a big one, but I wasn’t sure if it was a fish. I told Lawton that if I’d have got him good, he would have jerked me in! I don’t want to catch me another deer!”

Buck Carver explained, “If you ever slip up to a hole and hook a rainbow or a brown, either one, and hook him pretty hard, you might as well forget about that rascal if you lose him, because he ain’t gonna bite again that day.

“One time in my life I caught one over here in Kelly’s Creek. One of the biggest ones I’ve ever caught. It was about sixteen and a half inches long. It was awful broad.

“Anyhow, I was up on the side of the bank, and I dropped my hook in. It had a red worm on it. That fish hit the hook, and I got him about five foot out of the water, and he splashed off and went back in. The hook tore out. I went on up the creek. I was gone about two hours or two hours and a half. I didn’t think he’d bite again that quick, but he took it so fast when I dropped it in there the first time, I figured he must be pretty hungry. I come back down on the other side of the creek where I could get down in the water with that fish. That thing hooked up again. I scrambled around and let him wrestle around over that hole and finally got ’im out. He was about a

pound, pound and a half, and there in the roof of his mouth was a big 'ol tore place where I'd hooked him the first time. That was the quickest I've ever got one of them durn things to bite again, and know it."

Minyard Conner informed us, "I'll tell you a fishing story that happened while I was fishing last summer. We was up yonder at the creek, and there was just so many people, I couldn't get in. I had on a pair of wading boots, and they had just thrown a stockard in there about twenty inches long—one of them stripers. He was as long as your arm. He'd swim in there, back and forth, and everyone would throw their hook at him. Well, there wasn't no place for me to stand, so I decided I would wade the river. There was laurel on the other side, and I went over there. That fish had come down and around over there, and everybody was throwing their hooks at him.

"I said to myself, 'Directly, he'll come up here, and I'll snag him.' He swam up that channel, and I saw him coming. I placed my hook in the water in that channel and gave it a yank and caught him on the right side of the head. He like to have jerked the pole out of my hand. He went round and round, and everyone pulled their hooks out of the water so I didn't tangle him up with none of them. He just run everywhere, and I guess there must have been over a hundred people standing there fishing. After a while I slung him out and stuck my finger in his mouth and said, 'Whoopee!' And it was all over."

Leonard Jones related, "I used to go fishing, and if I had any luck and come home, my wife, Ethel, would say, 'Well, did you buy them?' Well, one time I went and caught one or two cats, real good ones. They's some fellow there that had four more real good ones. He said he'd take a dollar for 'em. I just give him a dollar and strung them up with mine. Ethel said, 'Well, where'd you buy 'em at?'

"I said, 'Every time I catch any you always accuse me of buyin' them.' I guess it was two or three years before I told her that I bought them. I wouldn't tell her. That's the only ones, though, that I have bought, but she always accused me, if I had good luck, of buying 'em."

Melvin Taylor reminisced, “We were out in a boat. We were up early in the morning. We saw [a] fish, but there was something wrong with it. I thought at first he had a shad hung in his mouth, but I think his floater was busted. You know, when he runs, he bails that water and takes off. We’d come up on him, and when he saw the boat motor, he would go out of sight and come up way over on the other side of the lake. First thing we’d see was a break of water, so we’d crank up the boat and run on over there. We’d see him dig off again, so we had run him around the lake about thirty minutes or longer, and I told Wesley [my son] if we ever run him into shallow water, we might get him. So we went way on the other side of the lake, and we saw him jump. When we got back over there, he took off again.

“Wesley said, ‘Daddy, I’m glad it’s early in the morning. Ain’t nobody around. They’d think we were drunk or crazy one.’

“We went on over there and sure enough, he went in, broke water, and went out to shallow water. I told Wesley, ‘If we slip up behind him so he can’t see us, we might get him.’ So that time I saw him, his head was at the other direction. I told Wesley to get a net and both hands. ‘Boy! It’s a big one.’ I couldn’t see the fish. I was paddling and Wesley, he was a-looking. He was bent down, had the net in the water. About that time Wesley came falling over backwards in the boat with that fish in the net. Wesley told me, ‘He ran that way, and when he seen the shallow water, he whirled around and run right slap into the net, headfirst!’

“That’s how we caught that one. Wesley said, ‘How are we going to tell how we caught it, Daddy?’

“ ‘Well,’ I said, ‘we’ll just have to tell the truth, son.’

“He said, ‘Ain’t nobody going to believe you.’

“And I said, ‘I know they’re not. We’ll have a lot of fun out of this.’

“So we fished around a while longer, but wasn’t doing no good. We went over to Jack Hunnicutt’s bait place about daylight or a little after, and there were four or five men buying bait. We came in, and they asked us what we caught him on. We told them we caught it on one of Jack Hunnicutt’s smiling night crawlers. They said,

‘Sure ’nough, how did you catch him? What kind of outfit did you have?’

“ ‘To tell the truth, we didn’t have him on no line. We just run him down and caught him in the landing net.’ Boy, they just punched one another and was laughing and going on, you know, and we come on and showed him around. We had more fun out of that, and they rode me and Wesley about that for two or three months. That’s the way we caught that fish.

“Everybody said, ‘Well, that’s not no fun to catch one like that.’

“And I told them, ‘I tell you what. You try running one down with a motorboat and catching him in a landing net. You’ll find out it’s a pretty good sport.’

“That was really an experience. That one weighed eight pounds and ten ounces—that’s a nice one. You don’t get many that size in this country.”

ILLUSTRATION 25 Jake Waldroop

Jake Waldroop recalled, “Yeah, a fish has taken my hook off before. You just have to go out on the bank and tie you on another one and go right back after ’im.

“I was a-fishing up there on Kimsey Creek one time, and I had caught me a big brown trout. He was about sixteen inches long. I got him pulled out and put him on my string, then went on and throwed my bait in. I seen another coming at it, and he struck at the hook. I pulled, and I had him, and I said, ‘That’s the biggest fish I’ve ever caught in my life.’ He just took off right down the river with me, and I just had to let go. He got down in some muddy water, and there was a sandbar there. I finally got him out. I had

caught him by his tail. He wasn't as big as nothing, but he had more power to pull because of where he was caught. The hook had missed his mouth and caught in his tail. That hook is just as sharp as anything that can be made.

"We had a big fish on Kimsey Creek, a big old rainbow. We fished for that fish for three years and never could catch it. One time it rained all night, and the next morning, while we were getting breakfast, a big old crawfish came crawling out the camp door. Al jumped up and got him and put him in a box that we had. He said he was going up the creek and catch that big trout that morning. I had to round up the sows and feed them. While I was down there, I heard Al yell. You never heard such in your life! So I went back to the camp and he said, 'He got away.'

"I said, 'No, he didn't. What's that you've got covered up over there?' He had him covered up in some leaves. He uncovered him and took him out, and he was twenty-one inches long.

"He said, 'I put that crawfish on and started up at the head and come down, and I felt him [on my line]. I let him chew on it a little bit until I got him.'

"He had already swallowed that crawfish plus two more and two big chubs about five inches long. He had all that in him when Al caught him. He was a greedy one.

"We played a trick on a man one time. His name was David Rouse. Frank Long and I were up there at our camp, and David came along. He was camping down at another camp, and we told him to go get his stuff and come on up there with us. He said, 'Do you want to go fishing?'

"We told him we were planning on going. So he said he would be back directly. He came on back in, got supper, and got ready to go. There was an old log laying out in the water. It would go down, then back up, down, then back up. I got my hook caught in it. It looked just like a fish when it went down and up, so we thought we would have some fun out of him. We told him there was a big fish down there at the river that he ought to get out of there. He went and put a number six hook on and went on down to the river. He pulled and pulled trying to get that big fish out. He said, 'Oh, I got

him.' He pulled 'til the end of his pole broke off. That old man died believing he had a fish at the end of his pole. We never did tell him no better."

ILLUSTRATION 26 Talmadge York

Talmadge York told us, "A bunch of us, we'd take ol' man Will Zoellner, and we'd camp. We'd set up at night 'til twelve or one o'clock listening to him tell these big ol' fish tales. He said he caught 'em so old the fish had moss on their backs back in them streams. Course we believed all that back then.

"It tickled me to watch him eat 'em. He could eat fish! Especially trout. After that, we got to going to these stocked streams. Went to the top of Wildcat one time and caught a bunch of them. He wouldn't let you cut their heads off. He eats heads and all. He can take a trout eight to ten inches long and start at the head and never spit a bone out. Eats every bone in there. I told him one time, 'If I eat them bones, it'd choke me to death.'

"He said, 'When they get about right there [bottom of the trachea], they're gone.' And I seen him eat six or eight trout, bones and all.

"Another time, me and Bobby Alexander was fishing. We was wading one side, both of us fishing from one side of the river, and there was fish right next to the bank under the bushes. It was deep out there, and we didn't want to get in over our heads and get our stuff wet. Bobby reached up to hold on to a bush, and he pulled a hornets' nest down. He didn't even see it. That bush with that nest

hit right on me. They liked to have stung me to death. I'll bet there was twenty-five stings right around the back of my neck.

"I went in under the water trying to get 'em off and finally did. We went on up the river, and there was a man and a woman camped up there. She had some alcohol and got me down on the table and fixed my neck up with that alcohol. They liked to have made me sick, so many of them.

"Fish won't never give up. I got one twenty-three inches long down in Dick's Creek up in Kay Swafford's field. I had a fly rod, and I had a lot of line out. I was fishing with worms that day, and I was pulling my line down through there, and he hit it. It was just a small creek, and he went thirty or forty feet. That's how much line I had out. I just run down the creek with him trying to take up line and finally got him up to the end of my pole. I thought I just run him plumb out on the bank. I started running up that bank, and the end of my fly rod hit the bank and broke it slap in two. I just kept a-running, and I got my fish. He was a nice fish.

"I don't know of no big fishing tales. One time a bunch of us went over to a little stream in the Glades. The season wasn't open yet. Me and my wife and Noah Hamby decided to go too. They was going to catch enough out of there for us to cook and eat. We got down in there. Cecil was watching for Bobby to fish, and he had hip boots. The little ol' stream wasn't three foot wide, but it was early spring. He had his spinning rod, and he was fishing in there.

"My Jeep was just like the one the game warden had then, and Cecil thought it was the game warden coming in there. He hollered to Bobby that the game warden was a-coming, and he took out right across the hill. His spinner caught in a bush, and he just kept a-going. He run all his line off and broke it, and just kept right on a-going. We drove on down there and kept hollering for him to come back. I guess it was thirty minutes before he come back, scared to death. He had on them hip boots and had a hard time running.

"One time a bunch of us went down to this old mill. Me and Harry walked across the mountain. We went different ways for different parts of the river. We fished down [stream] and didn't get a strike below Bull Shoulder—way down—and it was just as cloudy

as it could be and thundering. It come up a rain, and we waited just a few minutes.

"Then we started fishing back up the river where we had already fished, and everywhere we'd throw that plug, we'd catch a fish. I reckon that rain started 'em a-biting.

"Some of the boys would take us down to the river. Then they'd take the car around, and we'd fish up to them. A lot of times we'd camp, and cook and eat those fish right on the bank. We caught several good trout, brown trout.

"One time down on Licklog, we fished for them little catfish that wouldn't be but about six inches long. Every once in a while, we'd catch one of them big white suckers. You can't eat them. You have to throw them back, but you have a lot of fun getting them out. They cut up awful. We caught some of them that weighed two pounds.

"The last few times I went in there and fished that river, it was pretty rough and deep in places. I got to where I couldn't get over the rocks, couldn't get my feet up over them. But we had a lot of fun back in those times."

APPENDIX

Compiled by Doug Adams and Kyle Burrell

THE BASS FAMILIES

Bass are in either the black bass “family” or the white bass family.

BLACK BASS

Black bass is a collective term used to indicate any one of ten large members of the sunfish family. They live in warmer lakes and ponds, as well as warm to cool rivers. All black bass build nests in which the male guards the eggs.

Largemouth Bass (a.k.a. Bigmouth Bass, Black Bass, Bucketmouth Bass, Green Bass, Green Trout). The largemouth bass is one of the most important freshwater game fish in North America. It has dark stripes on its sides, but they disappear as it matures. Young fish have dark lateral bands. Their mouth is large and extends back beyond the eye. Large-mouth bass usually weigh less than ten pounds. It spawns in spring from March through May in waters that are sixty to seventy degrees. Large females can lay up to forty thousand eggs. They eat small fish, worms, insects, crawfish, small turtles, and frogs. They strike artificial lures or live bait.

Redeye Bass (a.k.a. River Trout, River Bass, Shoal Bass). The redeye greatly resembles the smallmouth. It is a small bass found in rivers. Redeye bass are up to fourteen inches long and are very common in the Chattooga River. They eat small fish and crawfish. They can be caught on spinners and lures. Many anglers prize them because they are scrappy, colorful, and highly palatable.

Smallmouth Bass (a.k.a. Bronzeback Bass). The smallmouth bass is considered by many to be our greatest freshwater game fish. The

color of smallmouth bass is golden bronze-green or brownish green with distinct faint vertical bars on the side of the body. The mouth extends to the pupil of the eye, but not beyond. There are scales on the base of the fins. Smallmouth bass usually weigh less than six pounds. They prefer deeper, cooler waters and are found in clear streams and lakes. They spawn in the spring in waters that are sixty-five to seventy degrees. They feed on minnows, worms, insects, frogs, crawfish, and hellgrammites. Smallmouth bass will strike artificial lures and live bait.

WHITE BASS

The white bass are the true bass family. White bass are found in rivers, but seem to prefer large lakes with relatively clear water. In the spring, they run up rivers and spawn in running water without building nests where the eggs free-float or settle to a gravel bottom.

Striped Bass (a.k.a. Rockfish). The striped bass is colored greenish or brownish on the upper part of the sides, silvery or brassy below, and white on the belly. Seven or eight dark, well-defined stripes run from the back of the gill cover to the base of the tail. Size ranges of ten to twenty-five pounds are common. Good fishing occurs during the spawning run. The bait commonly used is shad.

White Bass (a.k.a. Striped Bass, Silver Bass). This white bass looks like a striped bass but is much smaller. Sizes range up to four pounds. They swim in schools and are often seen chasing shad on the surface of the lake. They will strike minnow lures and spinners.

THE CARP FAMILY

Carp are large minnows. They are golden in color. The goldfish raised in aquariums and ponds are part of this family. The carp family includes over three hundred American species. They can grow to three feet long and over twenty pounds in weight. They are found in lakes and slow streams. Carp are bottom feeders.

THE CATFISH FAMILY

The catfish family contains over one thousand species. They have smooth, scaleless bodies with long barbels around the mouth. Depending on species, catfish can mature at less than a pound but can grow up to 150 pounds. Most catfish live in quiet waters, but some live in moderately fast-running streams. Catfish are scavengers and will eat other fish, frogs, crawfish, insect larvae, crustaceans, clams.

Blue Catfish (a.k.a. Channel Catfish). The blue catfish color is a rather dark bluish gray on the back, which fades into a lighter slate gray on the sides. It has no dark spots. The average size is two to five pounds. Blue catfish weighing twenty pounds are common, and they can grow to over one hundred pounds.

Brown Bullheads (a.k.a. Bullhead, Mudcat). Brown bullheads are light brownish yellow to black-brown in color and are found in slow or stagnant water. The average size is less than a pound, with large brown bullheads reaching four pounds.

Channel Catfish. Channel catfish are considered the sportiest member of the catfish family. They are colored silvery olive or slate blue with round, black spots. Channel catfish have a deeply forked tail and fairly slender body. They can weigh up to three or four pounds and prefer clear moving water. Most of their feeding is at night. They spawn in the spring with an upstream migration.

THE CRAPPIE FAMILY

Black and White Crappie (a.k.a. Bridge Perch, Calico Bass). The crappie is closely related to sunfish and black bass. The two species, black and white, are very similar. They can grow up to sixteen inches long and can weigh over two pounds. Crappies eat small fish, insects, crustaceans, and worms. Jigs may be used in casting for them. They are easily caught in the spring and make excellent pan fish.

THE PERCH FAMILY

Yellow Perch (a.k.a. Ringed Perch, Yellow Bass). Yellow perch are the best-known perch. They are yellowish, and their sides are distinctly barred. Their fins are tinged with red. The average size is less than a pound. They are found in lakes and are a school fish. Spawning occurs in the spring, and the eggs are laid over sand. They eat insects and small fish. They will strike live minnows and artificial lures.

Walleye (a.k.a. Walleyed Bass, Walleyed Pike). Walleye is a large dark perch. They are becoming less common in local lakes. Walleye weigh up to ten pounds and are also very good to eat,

THE PIKE FAMILY

Northern Pike (a.k.a. Pike). The scaling, which covers the entire cheek but only the upper half of the gill, identifies northern pike. They weigh up to thirty-five pounds and can grow to over four feet long. Northern pike are slender with narrow pointed heads and duckbill-shaped mouths.

Chain Pickerel (a.k.a. Jack, Pickerel, Pike). Chain pickerel are much smaller than northern pike, but look almost identical. They grow to a maximum of three feet in length and also have a duckbill-shaped mouth.

THE SUNFISH FAMILY

Sunfish are smaller than bass, generally about eight inches long. They spawn in the spring. Shallow, saucerlike nests are fanned in the sand and gravel. The male guards the nest. There are hundreds of species.

Bluegill (a.k.a. Bream). Bluegills are small fish about as big as your hand. They can be caught in large numbers in our lakes using crickets, worms, and artificial flies.

Redbreast Sunfish (a.k.a. Bream, Shellcracker, Yellowbreast Sunfish). They are the same size as bluegills and are often found in cool rivers.

Warmouth (a.k.a. Goggle-eye, Redeye, Rock Bass). The warmouth looks similar to a bream but has a larger mouth. They live in lakes and streams and are usually found near shorelines. Maximum length is about eleven inches. They will strike almost any bait and are not good fighters.

THE SUCKER FAMILY (a.k.a. Hog Sucker, Redhorse Sucker, White Sucker)

The sucker is a carplike fish. It is a freshwater fish found in streams, rivers, ponds, and lakes. Suckers spawn in the spring with a definite upstream migration. Their mouth is directed downward rather than forward. They feed on aquatic plants, insects, worms, and mollusks.

THE TROUT FAMILY

Trout are related to salmon but are smaller. Trout are usually found in fresh water. They require clean, cold water to successfully spawn. Wild trout are spawned in the streams. Trout are also raised in hatcheries and are released in suitable fishing waters. The state of Georgia classifies all of the streams in Rabun County as trout streams.

Brook Trout (a.k.a. Brookie, Mountain Trout, Native Trout, Speckled Trout, Speck). Brook trout have light olive-green worm-tracked markings on the upper parts of their body and white on the leading edges of their belly fins. Wild Southern Appalachian brook trout rarely exceed twelve inches in length. Hatchery brook trout can be raised to over sixteen inches in length. Brook trout thrive in water below sixty-five degrees. They spawn in the fall. The female fans a nest with her tail, and when the nest is completed, she spawns with

the male. Afterward, she covers the nest with fine gravel. Brook trout eat insects and small fish. The brook trout is actually a member of the char family and is the only trout native to the Southern Appalachians. When they are hatchery-raised, they are called brook trout, and when they are wild, they are called speckled trout.

Brown Trout (a.k.a. German Brown, Speckled Trout). Brown trout are marked with large, lightly bordered red spots. They are brownish in color with a golden yellow belly. Wild brown trout can grow to a length of thirty inches in the Southern Appalachians. They require cold, clean water, especially for spawning. They spawn during the fall in the same way as the brook trout. They eat insects, crawfish, and small fish. The brown trout are native to Europe and were introduced to the Southern Appalachians about a hundred years ago.

Golden Trout. The golden trout, found in some commercial trout ponds in this region, are albino trout. They are the products of a hatchery, and they are not the same as the wild golden trout found in remote areas of the western United States. They are popular in some commercial catch-out ponds because of their unique coloration.

Rainbow Trout (a.k.a. Bow). Rainbow trout have a dark olive back with black spots all over their bodies. They have a broad, red, lateral band extending down the side from the cheek to the tail. Wild rainbow trout in the Southern Appalachian region rarely exceed sixteen inches in length. They spawn from February to April, depending on the water temperature, in the same manner as brook and brown trout. They eat insects and small fish. The rainbow trout is native to the West Coast of North America and was introduced to the Southern Appalachians within the last hundred years.

OTHER FISH

Crawfish (a.k.a. Crawdad, Crayfish). Crawfish are not really a fish, but a crustacean that looks like a miniature lobster. Crawfish make excellent bait for trout, bass, and most game fish.

Eel. An eel is a long slender fish that looks like a snake with a fin on top and bottom. Eels spawn in the ocean and swim up rivers and streams to live. They have sharp teeth, are olive brown in color, and have no scales.

Hornyhead (a.k.a. Knottyhead). This small fish grows up to ten inches long and has little hornlike spikes on its head. This fish is not particularly good to eat and is usually caught by accident when trout fishing. It is the adult member of the chub and minnow families.

Minnows (a.k.a. Dace, Darter, Chub, Shiner, and True Minnow). These are the small fish that live in lakes and streams. They are often used as bait for bass and crappie. They are usually small—less than three inches in length—and are silver in color.

Sculpin (a.k.a. Craw Bottom, Molly Craw Bottom). Sculpin live on the bottom of the creek between rocks and are brown in color. They have a big head and a narrow tail. They are small, with the largest reaching about four inches in length. They make good bait for brown trout.

TURTLES FROM CREEK TO CROCK

“It makes you kind of mad, though, when you go to your hooks and find half of your bait gone and your line twisted up around another bush.”

—Lindsey Moore

We heard of a woman in Clarkesville, Georgia, who had quite a reputation in the area for cooking turtles. Her name was Mrs. Lillie Lovell. We sent a team to meet her, and she agreed to show us how to prepare and cook a turtle—if we would catch one and bring it to her.

After a number of failed attempts at the lake behind our school (the turtles simply stole the bait each time and left a bare hook behind), we were about to give up when Lake Stiles, one of our contacts and good friends, heard of our struggle and caught a live turtle for us! We kept it and fed it until the day of the interview when, with mixed emotions, it was cleaned and eaten.

Mrs. Lovell passed away before the article was completed, so students took the photographs from her interview to Lindsey Moore, a local resident who could tell them what was happening in the photos. He also shared his method of catching, cleaning, and cooking turtles.

—Pat Marcellino and Kenny Crumley

Lindsey Moore: You’ll find the cleanest turtles in a fishpond. Just about all of the ponds around here have them. And you know what a bullrush or a swamp is? Well, now, if you get a turtle out of there, he’s goin’ to have leeches on him, which is a little worm. It don’t hurt him, but it don’t look good. The turtle is awful dark and nasty looking when you get him out of the swamp. But I would advise

anybody that's huntin' for turtles to get them out of a pond or a river. It wouldn't be a good idea to get him out of a marsh.

You get you a chicken gizzard or fat meat for bait. You need to use what they call carpenter's twine, and you want to use a tough hook. When you buy your hook and your line, you'll have to make allowance for where the line goes through your hook, 'cause if you don't, you're going to get your twine bigger than your hook eye. Now tie your line in a fisherman's knot on the end of the twine, and it ain't going to slip. You run it back through your hook eyes, and then you pull it, give it a yank, and it ain't going to go nowhere. The turtle will be there when you get there.

Now you want to tie your line to something that gives, like a limb, 'cause when you hang a monster, he's going to yank real hard; and if you tie it to a tree, he's going to break your line. If he is around a limb that gives, he'll be there when you get there, unless he chews the line in two or somebody cuts him loose.

I'll tell you, what I generally do is set out my bait about one o'clock in the afternoon. You can't do this at night unless you ain't got nothin' to do but loaf. It's best to check them every three hours 'cause he might accident'ly break that line if he's a pretty good turtle. I've been settin' mine about one o'clock, but most any time will do.

I'll tell you, another way you can catch them is to get you some milk jugs and tie a line two and one-half to three feet long on the milk jug and bait it with chicken gizzards or fat meat and throw it out in the pond. If he hangs himself, nine times out of ten, he's going to go to the banks. You don't have to go out in a boat and get him. He'll hunt him a brush pile. He thinks he is getting away. They're funny creatures.

I'll tell you, in catchin' a turtle, it's the art of outsmarting it—just like killin' a crow. If you kill a crow, you say, "Well, I outsmarted him!" It makes you kind of mad, though, when you go to your hooks and find half of your bait gone and your line twisted up around another bush.

ILLUSTRATION 27 Patrick Marcellino, Ken Crumley, and Lindsey Moore discuss cooking turtles.

The biggest one I caught was at Toccoa Falls [Georgia]. I guess he weighed twenty pounds. Me and him couldn't agree at all. I tried to get the deputy sheriff to give me his gun to shoot it, but there was too many people around there and he wouldn't do it. I dragged him over the highway and got me a pair of pliers and a knife and just cut his head off!

You'd better believe turtles can move fast. When they snap, they snap. They don't fool around about it. You get one mad, and he's really mad. The best thing to do when you get one is shoot him right in the top of the head.

If you do that, then he won't snap you! If you try to handle that rascal—for instance, if he's hung on a hook and you pull that hook out—he's liable to jerk that string out of your hand and snap you. So if you have a pistol or a rifle, just shoot that rascal right quick like so he can't snap you.

If a snappin' turtle bites you, all I know for you to do is to take something and pry its mouth loose. You don't want to pull it, or he'll bring a hunk out of you. You will just have to get a screwdriver or board or something and pry his jaw loose.

You can cut one's head off and hang him up, and in the morning that turtle will still be movin'. I've taken the heart out and laid it on the table, and its heart will still be beating. Those things are hard to kill. The old saying is they'll hold you till it thunders. [If one grabbed me,] I'd pray for rain right quick, or get somebody to do a rain dance!

I have heard that there was seven different types of meat in a turtle. According to the Bible and the old people, there's meat for every day of the week. Now which one it is, I couldn't tell you. I never did pay attention to that. I just ate it!

[How long I cook it] all depends on how big it is. If it's a young one, I'd fry it; and, if it's a large one, I'd put it in stew. The reason for that is the larger ones are tougher, and the more you boil it, the better it is to eat. If you take a turtle that weighs fifteen pounds, you'd want to boil him and put him in a stew. I don't have any special recipes. I just fix it like a regular stew. Now some people might have some special recipes, but I don't. I'd say to boil a big one at least eight hours. Don't get the water boiling hot—just slowly turning. Every once in a while, take your spoon and stir him up or shake him or whatever.

Now, I'll tell you something else that's a good idea: When you boil it, chip up an onion and sprinkle it in there. The reason for that is sometimes they don't smell too good cooking, and the onion will help.

Lillie Lovell: Turtles don't get too big around here now. They get up a pretty good size, though. Carlos brought one in that was about as big as the top of that stool. Now, he was a huge 'un! I had a big dishpan, and we couldn't put it down in the dishpan. He caught him out of the pond. We caught sixteen out of that pond once—and four of them were big—but none of them were as big as that huge one.

But I don't know if them smaller-sized ones ain't better than the large ones are.

You can gig turtles, but we never did. I think you gig them in the back. I never did gig one, but now they've been gigged. Them shells are hard, though. [Instead of trying to go through his shell,] you'd be better off to catch him with his old head out. Then you have to be sharp. I don't think I could do that!

My husband always got 'em by the tail. He'd just catch 'em! Keep their head away from you, though, 'cause they'll bite you, and they are mean, too.

And we've caught 'em with a hook. But now we had mud turtle hooks—great big 'uns. I ain't seen one of them in a long time. You can use a regular fishhook, but you have to be awfully careful 'cause they'll get loose from that now! They'll snap it so quick you'll [lose them]. I guess they still have mud turtle hooks in fishing stores, but I ain't seen none since Daddy used them.

Now, for bait, put a piece of fish or chicken on the hook and set your hook out in a pond where it won't float up and get in trash or anything. You'll more than likely catch one!

Now Virge, my husband, always, when he was livin', I'd go with him, and he'd catch a chicken out of the chickenhouse—just a small little ol' chicken—chop it in two, and put half on each hook good. Go back the next mornin', and he had two mud turtles. Put the chicken on the hook and throw it right over in the pond and go back the next mornin'; that mud turtle will just pooch down in the mud, and there you'll get him! But you better be careful when you go to land him, now, 'cause he could get loose. Be very easy.

Now I like to cook these turtles when I clean them, unless I'm going to cut them up and freeze them like you would chicken or any other meat. When I cook them, I put them on and cook them till they're tender in salt and water. If you want to, you can put a little pod of pepper in. It won't hurt them a bit—gives that whang to them that they ought to have. Now if you boil the meat too long, it'll just come all to pieces, and I don't like it that way. I like to still have the pieces whole where you can pick them up just like a piece

of chicken. It's pretty meat, and I don't want it to come off the bone if I can keep it on.

The boiling part doesn't take too long. It depends on the size of the turtle. One great big one I cooked took me nearly four hours, but they usually don't take that long. I always take my fork and test it and see if it's tender enough. When it is, I take those pieces out and fry them in a frying pan—brown them up nice.

Lots of times I've found thirty or forty eggs in them. You know the size of a partridge [grouse or pheasant] egg, don't you? Like that size. The last one I cooked had thirty-five or forty in it. I took them out and put them in a bowl in there, and they filled a pretty good-sized bowl up! I don't care for the eggs too much, though. You can't hardly cook them. They're a kind of rubber, kind of a watery thing! They don't taste right to me. But, now, they say they make the best cakes there are, but I ain't done that now.

You'll get enough meat off an average-sized one to feed a good family. I've had them about the size of a dinner plate, and we'll have turtle for supper and two pieces left over to give to the cat! There's plenty of meat in them. I guess two pounds and a half in one with any size to it. Lots of times you can't eat a whole hind leg by yourself. There's plenty of eating in it, and it's good meat, too!

And I've always heard there's seven or eight different flavors of meat in them, and I've read that, too. But now, I don't know. They say the neck part is [like a] chicken breast. And they've got beef flavor in them—I hear that now. I don't know whether they've got hog meat. I don't think they have. But I just love them better than any kind of meat. And we've cooked them large and small.

Once we had a man that worked here, and we had a pipe—almost like a stovepipe—that carried water from the pond to the chickenhouse. Well, the water kept bein' cut off, and he'd come to the house and say, "I can't get nothin' out. The water's gone, and them chickens is starvin' to death!"

"That head'll bite you, now, after you've got it off. Yes, sir, the reflexes keeping goin'."

So Virge said, “They’s somethin’ in the pipe up there.” So they went up there and worked and piddled and couldn’t do nothin’ with it. So Virge just went in the pond and got down in there, and it was a mud turtle about the size of a dinner plate had stopped the hole up!

We had some men come here about fourteen years ago, and they drove up out there in the yard and said would we mind them a-goin’ turtle huntin’ in our creek? And I was at the door. I said no. And then Virge come walkin’ to the door, and I said, “Virge, this man wants to go down and see if they can catch some turtles.”

Virge said, “Go ’head, but I don’t believe you’ll catch any there.”

They went down the creek, and they come back with six! I don’t know how they did it! The man said, “They’re under the bank. We know where they’re at.” They’d reach in under there with their bare hands. This man had nothin’ but his hand! I wouldn’ta put my hand down under there! There coulda been anything under there! But they come back with ’em. Said they caught six back up at the upper end of my field.

ILLUSTRATION 28 Foxfire student Keith Head holding the mud turtle by the tail

COOKING THE TURTLE

Mrs. Lovell: You always want to hold that live turtle away from your body. They can bite you bad! That's how come we cut the head off, 'cause they've got strong teeth.

First, you have to cut the head off. You have to give 'em a stick and pull their head out and get 'em on a block or something. They'll

grab a stick. Just pull the head out and pop 'em with the ax. That head'll bite you, now, after you've got it off. Yes, sir, the reflexes keep goin'.

Mr. Moore: See how cautious she's handling this turtle? They're very dangerous. You see how pointed his bill is? You have to take caution. Now if you can get him to hold on to that stick and pull his head out, you can cut his head off. But, nine times out of ten, he won't hold on. If he won't, get a long pair of pliers and pull his head out just as far as you can. When you're cutting the head off, you want to cut it just as close to the head as you can 'cause he's got a neck four to six inches long. There's a lot of good meat in that neck; you don't want to waste that.

After you cut the head off, you want to dispose of it so the kids or you don't get ahold of it. That head will bite you three hours after you cut it off. After you cut the head off, you want to hang the body or lean it up against something to drain all the blood out of the shell. If you do that, it will make it cleaner and better to eat. If you lie it on its back, all the blood will get mixed up in the meat.

There are two knives I use to clean them with. You want to keep them extra sharp. For cutting in those joints and around the top, you want to use the big knife. The little knife is the one you use to cut out from under his hull 'cause he's really stuck in that hull. I'd advise you to use this larger knife to cut the breastplate off, and cut it just as close as you possibly can. There's a lot of good lean meat in there, and if you don't cut it close, you're going to pull all this meat off.

Mrs. Lovell: As soon as it quits dripping [blood], I put it in boiling water to scald it. Have your water good and hot and just set 'em down in that water. When you scald 'em, now, they'll move and crook their feet up and wiggle good and just knock water and go. But the hide comes off easy after you give 'em a good scalding. You can let the hot water out after you give 'em a good scalding. You can test it and see if the skin will peel. If it will, you got it ready.

You can run hot water over them to scald 'em, too. The water there in the sink is hot enough to scald 'em. Just set 'em down in a big pan, turn the water in on 'em, and let it run a few minutes; then you can scrape that [hide]. It all comes off white and pretty. They're easy cleaned. I don't mind it a bit, but, law, lots of people wouldn't clean 'em for nothin' in the world. I guess you could keep one a day or two before you cleaned it, but I wouldn't want to. I'd rather dress 'em when they're first caught.

ILLUSTRATION 29 Mrs. Lovell tries to get the mud turtle to snap at the stick so its head will protrude and be easy to cut off.

Mr. Moore: I like to wait till the following day to dress one. I don't have as many problems with 'im that way. If you clean it right after you kill it, its reflexes will still be so strong that it'll try to jerk its legs back into that shell.

Mrs. Lovell: After I scald it, I run cold water over it. That hot water draws 'em up, and then the cold water straightens 'em out. Next, I scrape 'em and get ready to start cuttin'.

Mr. Moore: When you first start cuttin' around the breastbone, you've got to turn the blade of your knife down. You have to give it a little pull to get it started. You want to keep that knife sharp as possible. Then, after you get it started, you want to turn the blade of your knife up to where you won't cut your meat. Just keep goin' all the way around the breastbone. Another reason for keepin' your knife turned up is so you won't cut the innards and ruin the meat.

Sometimes I keep that breastbone for a souvenir. My daddy always used to put it up above his door for some meaning, but I don't remember what it was. I generally just throw 'em away.

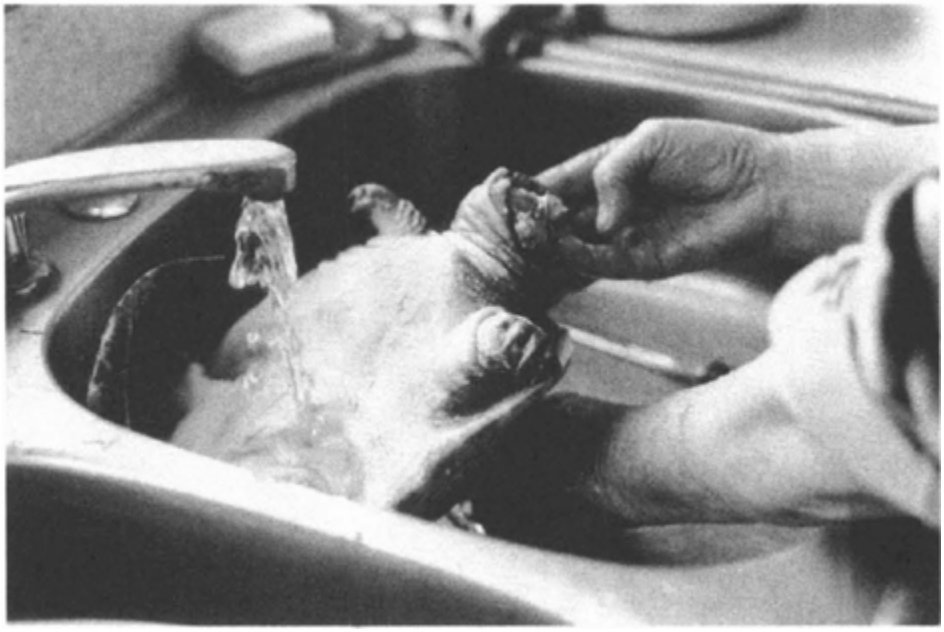

ILLUSTRATION 30 Running cold water over the turtle

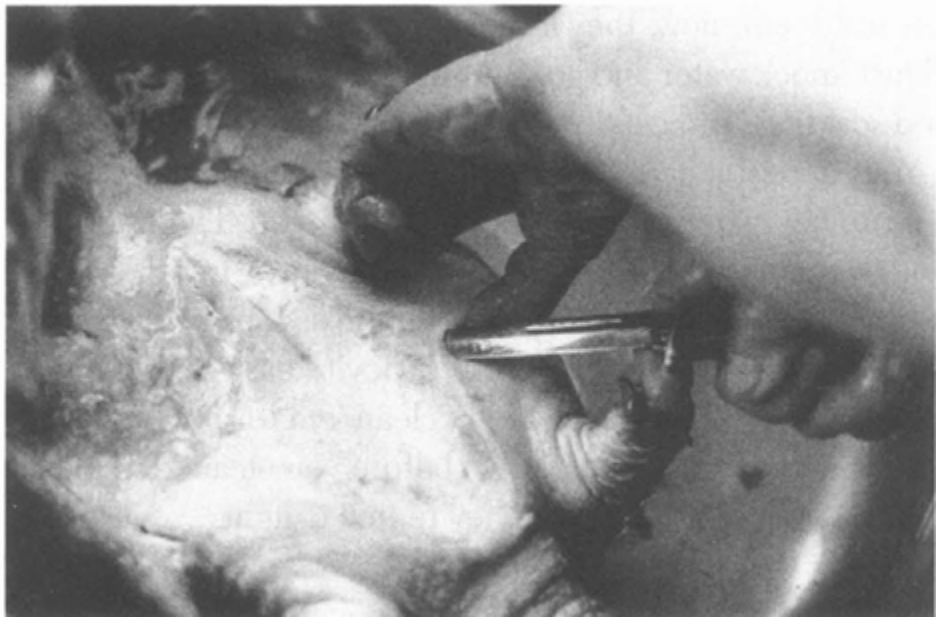

ILLUSTRATION 31 Beginning to remove the breastbone

Mr. Moore: Now she's getting ready to go in there and take the joints [legs] out. The tail of the turtle is good meat, too. A lot of people throw that tail away 'cause it looks boogerish and mean, but it's okay. All you've got to do is clip those little ridges off and put that son of a gun in the pan. It's the best eating you have ever seen.

In this photo, she is taking the joints out now. Those things have got joints from the claws right back up into the hull. I take it apart just like she's doin'. Start with a small knife. Then when you get all the joints cut [the joints that attach the legs to the inside of the hull], you want to go to a knife that's about ten inches long. That meat is really hung on to that hull, and you just can't pull it out. You've got to get in there and twist and pry to get it loose from the hull, and if you use a little knife, you'll break it.

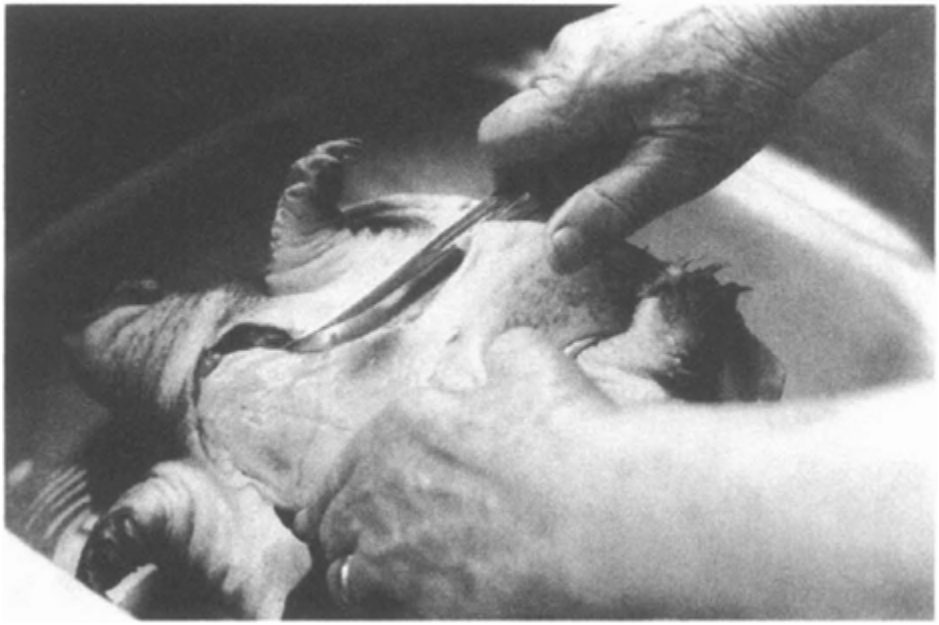

ILLUSTRATION 32 Cutting the joints

Mrs. Lovell: There's a joint in there, and if you catch it, you can get it off easy; but if you don't catch it, you've got a hard lick. It's hateful.

After you get the breastbone off, the intestines and stuff is still in there. They should be removed before you start workin' on that turtle. If not, you might go in there and bust a gut, and it would ruin the meat. Just reach in there and pull them out. If you're around a spigot, just run that whole thing under there. It's cleaner, and your hands won't get as messy.

Mr. Moore: Now some of your turtles is dark-meated and some is light-meated. I believe the male is light, and the female is dark. So, if you think the turtle ain't no good 'cause his meat is dark, don't worry. That's just the nature of the turtle.

Mrs. Lovell: When you get done cuttin' it up, you have a tail and four legs and a neck. The only thing you want to dispose of is the innards and the head. After I get it cut up, I cut the toenails off the legs. Then I either take the skin off or not, depending. Some people

don’t like it cooked with the skin on, but it don’t hurt it. It fries just as nice as chicken.

ILLUSTRATION 33 Loosening the meat from the hull

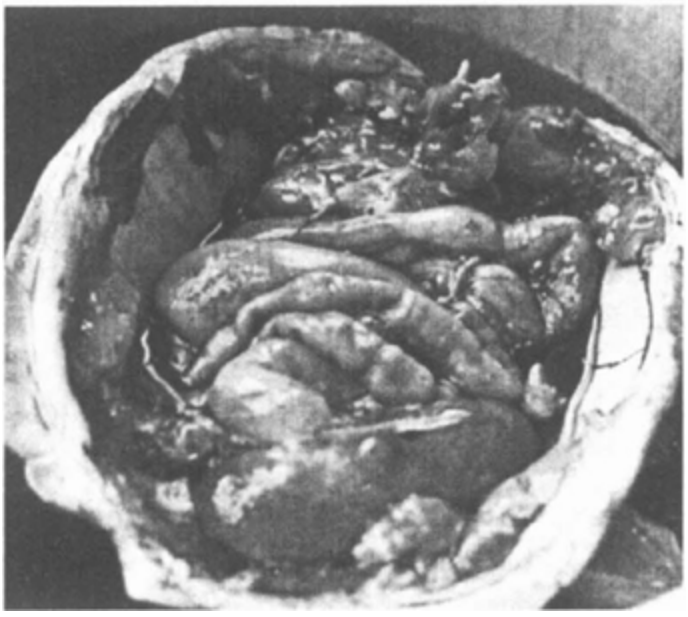

ILLUSTRATION 34 Internal organs

Mr. Moore: She cut those claws off, but if you scald it good, you can just take your fingers and pick those claws off there—just like pickin' berries, if you want to. It's awful easy. And there she's pulling the hide off one piece, but you can leave it on. It won't hurt that turtle none whatsoever.

Mrs. Lovell: Next, I put all the pieces in cold salt water. Don't use too much salt—just enough to draw the meat. It makes it good. They'll move after you salt 'em. You go to puttin' salt to 'em, and they go to movin'. Any time you catch fish or any kind of wild game that comes out of the water, if you'll put salt on him and soak him for a few minutes, you'll get that muddy taste out. Let it soak for a few minutes in that salt, and it'll make the meat taste better when you get ready to eat it.

Now I rinse it, put it in fresh water with more salt and a pod of red pepper. Then I put it all on the stove and boil it till it gets good and tender. I'll boil this one for about two hours.

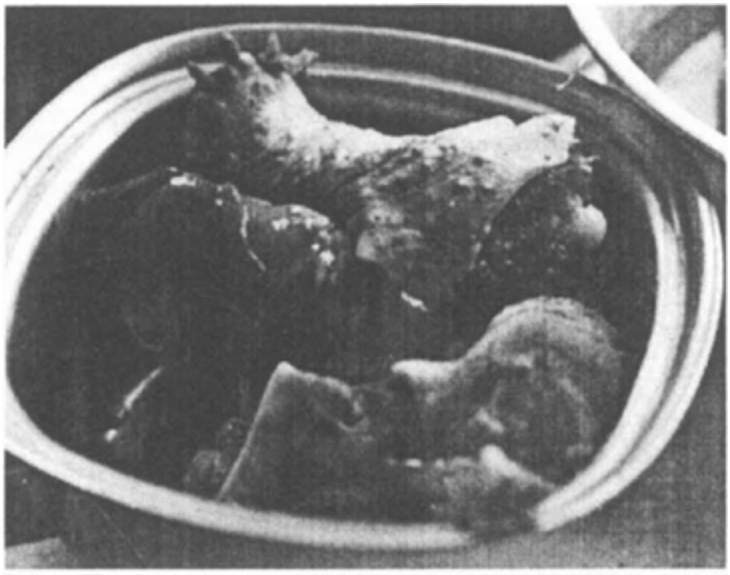

ILLUSTRATION 35 Turtle meat

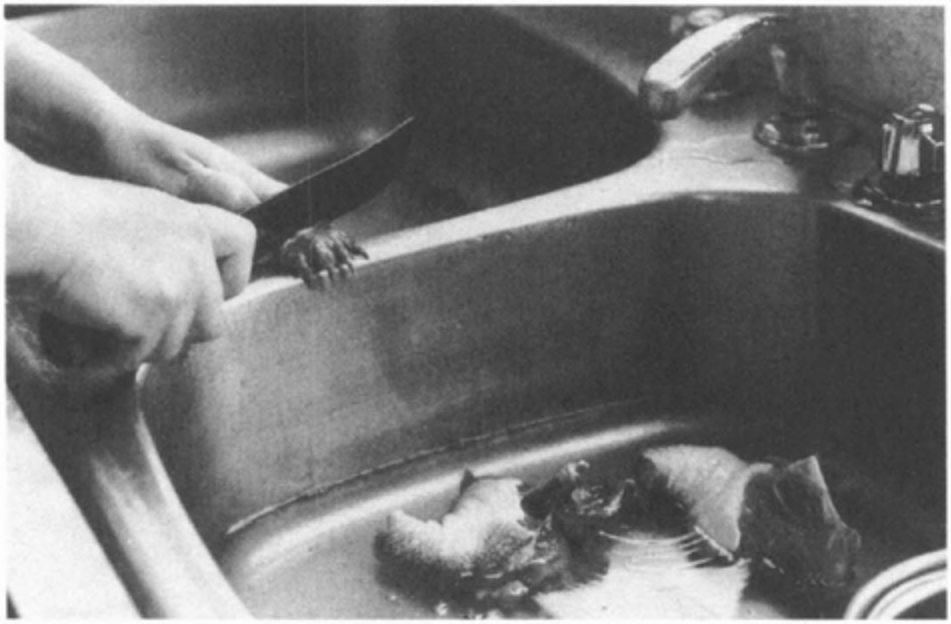

ILLUSTRATION 36 Cutting off the toenails

Mr. Moore: Remember that the older the turtle is, the tougher it is, and the longer you have to boil it. When I get ready to fry it, I put it in Shake 'n Bake—or just plain old flour and salt—and give him a good shakin'. When you're fryin' it, I usually have the pan full of grease, enough to cover it up. You probably could make something similar to chicken and dumplings out of this—you know, make a thick-like gravy. I've never tried that. I usually just put the turtle in a soup with tomatoes, onions—whatever comes out of the garden.

ILLUSTRATION 37 Soaking the meat in salt

ILLUSTRATION 38 Boiling the meat

Mrs. Lovell: After it's through boiling, I roll the pieces in cornmeal and black pepper and fry them in about half a cup of grease. It don't have to fry too long—just so it's browned good. And don't stir it too

much or it'll make the meat come off the bone. If the grease goes to poppin', just turn the heat down a little. Now sweet potatoes is the best thing you ever ate with turtle. Now see, we've got a real pile of meat. What about that!

ILLUSTRATION 39 The browned turtle meat

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